



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Role of on-site Architectural Courses in Enhancing Graduate Employability Skills across KRG Universities

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## ABSTRACT

To meet architectures contemporary demands, this study investigates the role of on-site practical learning in shaping the employability skills of architecture graduates in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Despite the expansion of architecture programs, a notable proportion of graduates remain unemployed or shifted into unrelated fields, exposing a gap between industry expectations and academic preparation. Employing a mixed-methods approach comprising a survey of 120 fresh graduates 2023–2024, interviews with industry professionals, and department heads. This research evaluates the effectiveness of experiential learning methods, such as site visits, internships, and field-based training in developing technical, generic, and personal competencies. The findings highlight a statistically significant inverse correlation between skill gaps and employment status, underscoring the practical relevance of structured, on-site learning. Industry experts mentioned prevalent “practice shock” among fresh graduates, attributed to limited professional exposure during their studies. Meanwhile, the head of departments identified inconsistent implementation of internships, weak university-industry partnerships, and limited university support as primary barriers to experiential learning integration. The study concludes that embedding longitudinal, real-world experiences within the curriculum, supported by strategic collaborations with professional firms, is essential to bridging the theory-practice divide and enhancing graduate employability skills. Recommendations include curriculum reform and internship standardization. By repositioning on-site learning as a core component of architectural education, Kurdistans universities can better prepare graduates for the dynamic needs of the construction industry.

**Keywords:** Employability, on-site learning, architecture education, work-based learning, experiential learning

## INTRODUCTION

The demand for employable graduates in Industries requires a skilled and advanced labor force, which has become a main issue in global higher education worldwide. Employability, generally defined, refers to an individual’s ability to secure and maintain employment through the possession of relevant knowledge, practical skills, and personal attributes, entrepreneurial passion, attitudes, and competencies of a learner that align and required with labor market needs to get employment and stay in the job market.<sup>[1,2]</sup> In today’s rapidly evolving job market, higher education institutions (HEIs) face pressure to improve graduates preparedness for work and their ability to excel in their chosen professions,<sup>[1]</sup> benefiting themselves, their teams, the community, and the economy.<sup>[2]</sup> In response to this demand, HEIs are increasingly expected not only to deliver academic knowledge. When creating the curriculum, the HEI system must inevitably take employers demands into consideration to prepare students for successful transitions into the workforce by fostering comprehensive employability skill sets.<sup>[3]</sup> The architectural profession, as a multidisciplinary and practice-intensive profession, presents a distinctive case in this discourse.<sup>[4]</sup> It requires a fine balance between

conceptual design thinking, technical competencies, and real-world application. Despite architecture schools commitment to equipping students and graduates with skills, theoretical and technical knowledge necessary for architectural professional practice, but many still lack employability skills, numerous studies, and employer feedback indicate a significant skills gap.<sup>[3]</sup> This gap is most evident in areas, such as problem-solving, analytical thinking, collaboration, communication, and teamwork skills increasingly prioritized by architectural firms in recruitment and project execution processes.<sup>[3,4]</sup> Contemporary architectural curriculum reforms have emphasized the approaches that confronted with

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issues known as “21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies,” including problem-solving, creativity, analytical thinking, collaboration, communication, ethics, and accountability skills, which have an impact on recent graduates employment. Consequently, several universities are modifying their instructional strategies to give students the tools they need to support their capacity for lifelong learning. The integration of 21<sup>st</sup>-century competencies into national curriculum worldwide has created a growing demand to assess student skill development.<sup>[4]</sup> A persistent gap exists between university instruction and real workplace demands, particularly affecting graduate employment prospects in developing economies where industry requirements change quickly.

Work-integrated learning and the development of practical skills are being emphasized more and more in contemporary educational approaches as crucial tactics for preparing students for professional careers. Three aspects are covered by these approaches: Applied learning through professional practice, workplace-based training, and career education preparation. These methods assist students in developing industry networks, defining career paths, and gaining competencies relevant to the workplace.<sup>[1,3,5]</sup> Twenty years of research shows that practice-based learning is a good way to build students skills.<sup>[2]</sup> Hands-on learning offers benefits, such as active engagement, better understanding, practical application, critical thinking, skill development, long-term retention, and team building. It encourages active participation, improves focus, motivation, and retention of information.<sup>[6]</sup>

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRG) faces challenges in aligning architectural education with labor market needs and industry. Despite the growth of architecture programs, 63% of college graduates are unemployed or working without a bachelor's degree. To improve student's attention, performance, and critical thinking, universities should focus on practical competencies and deeper university-industry partnerships. The Bologna process, a thorough accreditation system, can help create an outcome-based education system in the Kurdistan educational system. This approach will equip students with a realistic learning environment and prepare them for a demanding post-graduation world.<sup>[7]</sup>

The study highlights a significant gap in architecture education in the Kurdistan Region. Graduates lack the necessary technical, generic skills for employers and architecture industry professionals due to inadequate integration of on-site, practical, and experiential learning components in the architecture curriculum.

The study examines the impact of on-site practical learning, including site visits, internships, and field-based architectural training, on the employability skills of architecture graduates in Kurdistan. It evaluates their technical, personal, and generic skills, assesses their job preparedness, and analyzes industry perceptions of their skill readiness and the effectiveness of academic-industry collaboration.

The Research Hypothesis is that the integration of structured on-site practical learning components (e.g., site visits, internships, and real-world projects) within the architecture curriculum significantly improves graduate employability skills by enhancing technical, generic, and personal skills.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Conceptualizing Employability in Higher Education

Employability in HEIs refers to acquiring a mix of academic (technical) knowledge, practical abilities, and personal attitudes that enable graduates to secure and sustain employment.<sup>[1]</sup> One significant result of HEIs is employability. When creating the curriculum, the HEI system must inevitably take employers demands into consideration.<sup>[3]</sup> In the field of architecture, this structure covers the following three main skill areas: Technical skills, including design software competency, construction methodology, regulatory literacy, and spatial analysis. Generic skills: Encompassing teamwork, communication, leadership, time management, and adaptability. Personal attributes, such as initiative, self-efficacy, professional ethics, and resilience.<sup>[2,8]</sup> Despite that, architectural programs traditionally aim to achieve these competencies through studio-based learning and project development, employers increasingly report that graduates enter the profession lacking critical job-ready skills, particularly in soft skills, such as communication, leadership, and teamwork areas.<sup>[3,4]</sup>

### Work-Based Learning (WBL) in Architecture

WBL is a student-centric educational program or education strategy that focuses on flexibility, employer-student interests, and teamwork skills. It enhances graduate employability by improving communication, self-management, and problem-solving. Incorporating WBL in architecture courses can provide a strong foundation for shaping students into architects, increasing higher education participation, and skill upgrading for a competitive market.<sup>[3]</sup> Every WBL program is meticulously designed, combining classroom instruction with practical, well-organized work experience.<sup>[1]</sup> In architecture, WBL enhances employability through internships. Employers think that incorporating real-world projects into the curriculum will give students the necessary practical skills.<sup>[3]</sup> Internships are vital for engineers and architects, enabling students to apply theoretical knowledge and gain practical experience. The internship process, involving academic advisors, site supervisors, and interns, forms a partnership between the academic institution and the workplace, providing students with unique learning opportunities and inspiring professionals to guide their career aspirations.<sup>[9]</sup>

### Experiential Learning and On-Site Education Strategies

Experiential learning activities are a proven method for enhancing students employability skills, as they are not always directly transferable to the workplace due to the diverse contexts of education and employment. Over the past two decades, evidence has shown that experiential learning is an effective method for enhancing students skills.<sup>[2]</sup> Experiential Learning as theorized by Kolb, includes “learning by doing” and reflection on experience as a base for knowledge construction. An architectural education includes hands-on design exercises, site visits, material testing, physical model making, and participation in real-world projects.<sup>[2,6]</sup> These actions not only strengthen theoretical content but also develop interpersonal

collaboration and critical analysis. Programs, such as design-build studios and live projects, serve as immersive learning environments that simulate professional conditions, bridge the theory-practice divide, and enhance job readiness.<sup>[6,10]</sup> Field trips and site visits play an essential role in the foundation of students understanding of construction processes, regulatory frameworks, and material applications. These interactions create observation-based learning and provide a tangible connection between academic instruction and the built environment. Furthermore, they enable students to internalize environmental, contextual, and socio-cultural considerations that influence architectural decision-making.<sup>[8,11]</sup>

## The Role of Personal Development in Employability

Employability depends strongly on personal development. Skills, such as adaptability, self-reflection, professional ethics, and emotional intelligence, are increasingly recognized as critical for sustainable career progression.<sup>[2]</sup> Experiential learning environments, particularly those involving real client interactions, project responsibility, teamwork, and encourage the increasing of these personal competencies. Blooms revised taxonomy (2001) supports the integration of activities that foster deep cognitive engagement, including evaluation, analysis, and creative design, all of which are central to architectural learning.<sup>[6]</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

This research applies a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate the employability skills of architecture graduates in the Kurdistan region and pinpoint discrepancies between industry demands and university outputs. Three primary components comprise the research: A questionnaire survey of fresh graduates 2023–2024 from the eleven public and private universities in Kurdistan universities [Figure 1], interviews with industry professionals, heads of architecture departments. The study looks at how graduates employability skills for the labor market are affected by on-site learning techniques, such as internships, site visits, and on-site courses [Figure 2].

### Interviews with Architecture Engineering Construction Professionals (Employers/ Industry)

The study involves 10 in-depth interviews with architecture professionals to assess graduates performance in the real world. It addresses skill gaps, curriculum alignment, institutional challenges, and insights on university-industry collaboration and industry-academia alignment. Cross-cutting themes, such as regional construction trends and policy recommendations are also analyzed for actionable improvements.

### Questionnaire Survey

A survey was conducted among 120 fresh graduates from eleven architecture departments in the Kurdistan region to assess their employability readiness. The survey assessed technical, generic, and personal skills, identifying challenges in skills and academic gaps. Graduates also reflected on their

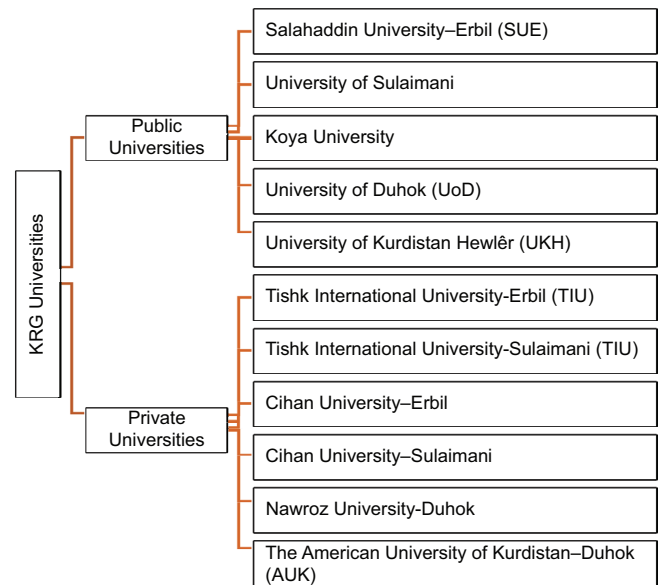


Figure 1: KRG university list

career transition, rating the curriculums relevance to industry demands and identifying unmet skill needs.

## Interviews with Head of Architecture Engineering Departments

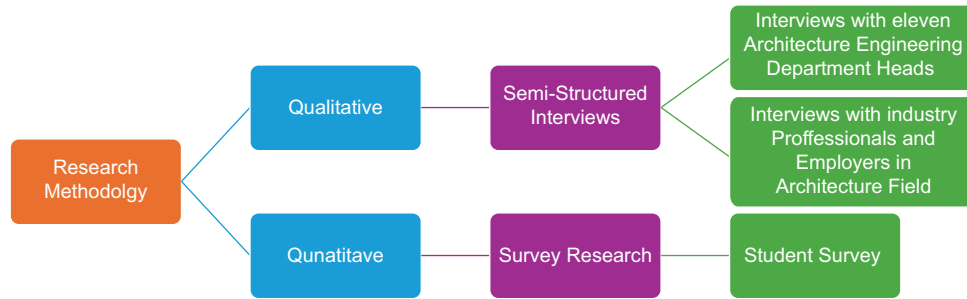
In-depth interviews were conducted with the architecture department heads in Kurdistan region Universities to understand present collaborations with industry, challenges in aligning education with market needs, and suggested strategies for stronger partnerships. It also shows institutional barriers and opportunities for integrating industry-relevant training, such as internships, site visits, field trips, and joint projects. The study evaluates the effect of on-site practical learning in enhancing employability skills.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Perspective of Architecture Professionals

Architectural professionals in the Kurdistan Region are concerned about the readiness of fresh graduates for professional practice. Interviews with ten architects revealed gaps in technical skills, adaptability, and university-industry collaboration. Graduates with AutoCAD, 3Rdsmax, and Revit software proficiency are still at a beginner level, with only 60% of the required technical proficiency. This suggests a need for more rigorous practical training in advanced software features, detailed drawings, and comprehensive construction documentation.

Professional architects are experiencing “practice shock” among new graduates, who struggle with workplace adaptation, multidisciplinary team collaboration, theoretical knowledge application, and managing workflows and deadlines, citing a lack of opportunities for professional judgment and practical problem-solving skills. The interviews revealed significant shortcomings in university-industry collaboration, with internship programs often limited by logistical constraints and a lack of structured frameworks. Present models are criticized for being too brief and poorly timed, resulting in a lack of



**Figure 2:** Research methodology

meaningful impact on students professional development. Some architects propose alternative approaches, such as longitudinal mentorship programs and distributing internship experiences across multiple years, to better prepare students for career transitions. Professional respondents recommended curriculum improvement in construction detailing, including comprehensive training in contemporary methods and materials, on-site practical components, and engaging with practicing professionals.

The Kurdistan Region faces challenges in architectural education, with graduates lacking technical proficiency and professional readiness for immediate workplace contributions. Practice shock and curriculum reforms are needed to prioritize structured real-world practice. Implementing distributed internships, early professional mentorship, and enhanced practical components could improve graduate employability and smooth the transition into professional practice. The insights of professionals can guide the reshaping of architectural education to meet industry demands and prepare students for successful careers [Table 1].

### Results of Questionnaire Survey

This study examines the employability skills status of recent architecture graduates (2023–2024) from the Eleven Architecture Department in Kurdistan Region universities, with participants ranging in age from 23 to 27 years old. The study examines the early career outcomes of recent architecture graduates in the Kurdistan region, revealing their educational goals and career paths. The employability rate is 49.2%, with 29.2% employed full-time, 13.3% part-time, and 6.7% self-employed. Nearly half of the graduates have secured employment, while 42.5% have not yet entered the workforce. However, 8.3% of respondents are engaged in continuing education, indicating commitment to academic and professional advancement. The data highlights the importance of addressing the unemployment rate and fostering a more inclusive and diverse workforce [Figure 3].

The survey reveals a relatively low employability rate in core architecture professions, with only 31.26% of respondents working in traditional architectural roles, such as design architect (20.83%), technical architect (0.83%), site architect (1.6%), interior architect/designer (5%), or assistant in architecture department (3%). This suggests that some of the surveyed graduates are actively practicing architecture in its primary forms. Instead, many have shifted to adjacent fields, some working in real estate (2.5%), graphic design (9.16%), or 3D visualization (3%). In addition, a small portion



**Figure 3:** Present employment status

(4%) have moved into completely unrelated sectors, such as business and marketing [Figure 4].

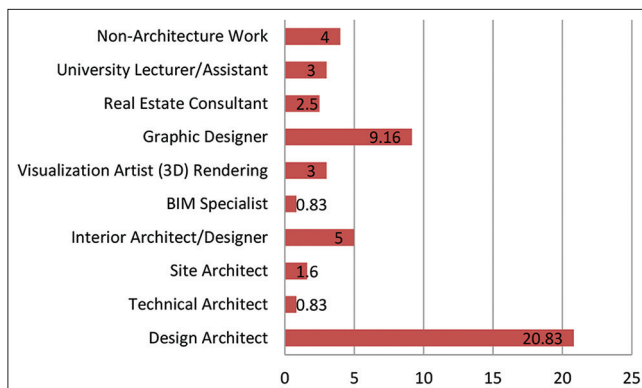
The survey highlights that on-site experience (75.4%) is the most valuable skill for professionals, followed closely by BIM/digital tools (71.9%) and construction knowledge (69.3%). This suggests that hands-on, practical skills are highly prioritized in the industry. Meanwhile, project management (40%) and teamwork (26.3%) [Figure 5].

The correlation analysis done between graduates present employment status and perceived critical skill gaps in their curriculum reveals a statistically significant negative relationship ( $r = -0.431, P < 0.001$ ). This indicates that individuals who identified more gaps in their education were more likely to face unemployment or part-time work, while those with fewer gaps tended to secure full-time roles. The moderate effect size suggests that curriculum shortcomings meaningfully impact employability, emphasizing the need for industry-aligned training to bridge these gaps.

The survey results indicate that graduates generally perceived their academic curriculum program as well in preparing them for professional challenges, with notable variations across different competency areas. The highest-rated aspects included problem-solving preparation (Mean = 3.63, standard deviation [SD] = 0.66), with 61.67% of respondents agreeing and 3.33% strongly agreeing that the program equipped them well for job-related problem-solving. Similarly, teamwork abilities (Mean = 3.51, SD = 0.64) and project management skills (Mean = 3.48, SD = 0.66) were viewed favorably, suggesting strong development in transferable professional skills. The applicability of digital tools (Mean = 3.56, SD = 0.77) and BIM knowledge (Mean = 3.55,

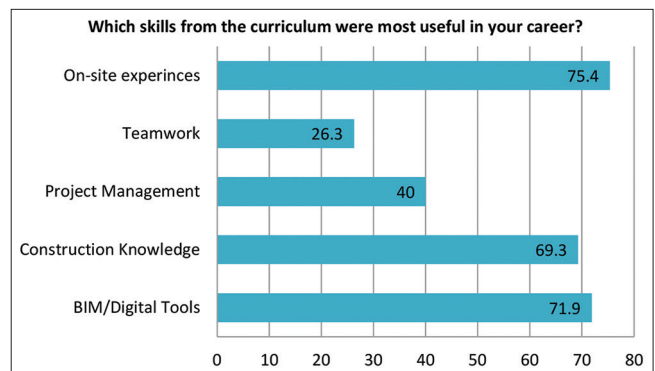
**Table 1:** Summary of the findings of an interview with an industry professional in the architecture field

Thematic area	Key insights and recommendations
Technical skill deficiencies	Professional architects reported that graduates possess limited proficiency in essential software tools (e.g., AutoCAD, 3ds Max, Revit), typically operating at a beginner level and demonstrating approximately 60% of the technical capacity expected in practice. Inadequacies were especially evident in advanced software use, detailed technical drawings, and construction documentation.
Workplace adaptability challenges	Professionals observed significant “practice shock” among new graduates, who struggle to adapt to workplace environments. Noted difficulties include collaborating in multidisciplinary teams, translating theoretical knowledge into practice, and managing real-world workflows and deadlines.
University–industry collaboration gaps	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Curriculum versus practice misalignment: Graduates can design but struggle with executable drawings, material specifications, or budget constraints.</li> <li>2. Technology disconnect: Universities teach basic software (AutoCAD, Revit)</li> <li>3. Regulatory and code knowledge: The University has limited emphasis on local building codes, zoning laws, or permit processes. While the Industry needs Compliance with regulations is critical, graduates often lack this practical knowledge.</li> <li>4. Professional soft skills: Universities rarely teach Client negotiation, Multidisciplinary teamwork (engineers, contractors) and Time management under deadlines. While in Industry: These skills determine project success and career advancement</li> </ol>
Professional recommendations for curriculum reform	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Extend internship programs into longitudinal mentorship models spanning from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> academic year to ensure sustained practical exposure.</li> <li>2. Implement a distributed internship structure, allowing students to engage with professional practice gradually across multiple academic years rather than in a single short-term placement.</li> <li>3. Enhance student training in contemporary construction detailing and modern building materials, bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and real-world applications.</li> <li>4. Integrate municipal code literacy into the curriculum through direct on-site engagement with real projects and regulatory environments.</li> <li>5. Introduce early-stage professional exposure, beginning from the 1<sup>st</sup> year of study, to cultivate industry-relevant skills and align students progressively with workplace expectations.</li> <li>6. Co-teaching: Practitioners teach specialized modules (e.g., construction law).</li> <li>7. Live projects: Students work on real, small-scale community projects.</li> <li>8. Industry advisory boards: Regular curriculum reviews with firms.</li> <li>9. Shared labs: Universities and firms collaborate on material testing/Digital fabrication.</li> </ol>



**Figure 4:** Fields in which architecture graduates are working

SD = 0.76) also received positive evaluations, reinforcing the program’s success in integrating relevant technological competencies. However, the lower ratings in technical skills and theoretical application highlight a persistent gap between academic instruction and workplace expectations, technical skills preparation (Mean = 3.06, SD = 0.89) and the application of theoretical concepts (Mean = 3.02, SD = 0.97) emerged as weaker areas, with 29.17% disagreeing on technical preparedness and 34.17% disagreeing with the practical application of theory. Industry alignment metrics, such as curriculum relevance to present standards



**Figure 5:** Useful skills in architecture curriculum for profession

(Mean = 3.37, SD = 0.73) and skills matching marketplace demands (Mean = 3.27, SD = 0.81), showed moderate satisfaction in industry alignment, suggest that while the curriculum remains generally relevant, periodic updates may be necessary to keep pace with evolving standards. To address these gaps, the program could benefit from enhanced on-site practical learning, stronger industry collaboration for real-world case studies, and iterative curriculum reviews to ensure technical content remains cutting-edge. These improvements would better bridge the theory-practice divide and further solidify graduates readiness for the dynamic construction industry [Table 2].

**Table 2:** Employability skills and learning outcomes achieved by graduates

Employability skills and learning outcomes achieved by graduates	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent		
The program prepared me well for the problem-solving challenges I face in my job.	2	1.7	2	1.7	38	31.7	74	61.7	4	3.3	3.6	0.66
The project management skills I gained in the program are applicable to my work.	1	0.8	4	3.3	55	45.8	56	46.7	4	3.3	3.5	0.66
My teamwork abilities developed during the program are valuable in my career	0	0	5	4.2	53	44.2	58	48.3	4	3.3	3.5	0.64
I was adequately prepared for employer expectations when I entered the workforce.	2	1.7	8	6.7	53	44.2	53	44.2	4	3.3	3.4	0.74
The program helped me develop the adaptability skills needed in the construction industry.	2	1.7	9	7.5	49	40.8	55	45.8	5	4.2	3.4	0.76
The BIM knowledge I gained has been useful in my professional work.	2	1.7	2	1.7	54	45.0	50	41.7	11	9.2	3.6	0.76
The construction knowledge I learned has proven relevant to my career.	2	1.7	8	6.7	56	46.7	48	40.0	5	4.2	3.4	0.75
I find myself adequately prepared in terms of technical skills for my job.	2	1.7	35	29.2	40	33.3	40	33.3	3	2.5	3.1	0.89
The digital tools I learned to use in the program are applicable in my work.	0	0.0	8	6.7	48	40.0	50	41.7	12	10.0	3.6	0.77
I can effectively apply the theoretical concepts from the program in practical situations.	3	2.5	41	34.2	31	25.8	39	32.5	5	4.2	3.0	0.97
My education aligned well with actual industry practices I've encountered.	1	0.8	13	10.8	55	45.8	47	39.2	4	3.3	3.3	0.75
The program content reflected present industry standards and requirements.	2	1.7	8	6.7	57	47.5	48	40.0	4	3.3	3.4	0.73
My education prepared me well for industry certification/engineering syndicate	2	1.7	7	5.8	54	45.0	47	39.2	7	5.8	3.4	0.77
The skills I learned match the actual demands of the construction marketplace.	3	2.5	14	11.7	53	44.2	44	36.7	4	3.3	3.3	0.81

(Contd...)

Table 2: (Continued)

Employability skills and learning outcomes achieved by graduates	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent		
The programs industry partnerships provided valuable professional connections.	3	2.5	8	6.7	57	47.5	48	40.0	4	3.3	3.4	0.76
The internship experience enhanced my understanding of real-world construction practices and on-site challenges.	2	1.7	2	1.7	38	31.7	74	61.7	4	3.3	3.6	0.66
Field trips/site visits provided practical insights that complemented my classroom learning effectively.	0	0	5	4.2	53	44.2	58	48.3	9	7.5	3.5	0.64

### Perspective of Head of Architecture Departments

The findings derived from structured interviews with heads of architecture departments across Kurdistan universities reveal a pronounced dissonance between theoretical pedagogy and applied practical training within architectural education. While mandating internship components fail to require structured on-site courses, termed as a “theory-practice divide” in architectural pedagogy. This institutional gap manifests most notably in the uneven implementation of practical internships across universities. While three major universities (Salahaddin, Sulaimani, and Duhok) have integrated semester-long internship courses into their 5<sup>th</sup>-year curriculum, the remaining institutions continue to treat practical internship in summer. This disparity suggests a lack of standardized implementation of practical internship requirements, potentially creating unequal learning outcomes among graduates from different universities.

Results indicate that existing field visits (averaging 15–20 annually) provide only superficial exposure to real-world practice, falling short of the immersive, participatory learning experiences needed for competency development.

Institutional barriers to effective practical training emerged as a dominant theme in interviews, such as industry-university collaborations, budget, and safety of construction sites. The head of departments ensured that the department capacity about most instructors have recent industry experience. This academic-practice gap significantly impacts the quality of practical instruction, as departments struggle to bridge theoretical concepts with present professional practices. Perhaps most critically, the study revealed weak university-industry linkages, with few formal partnerships between academic institutions and architectural firms. This lack of collaboration represents a missed opportunity for creating meaningful experiential learning pathways for students.

The Kurdistan region offers both challenges and opportunities for architectural education due to its rapid urbanization and construction. However, this potential is largely untapped, highlighting a critical gap in preparing students for local practice. The study suggests curriculum reform to integrate on-site practical learning in architectural education. Universities should establish formal partnerships with architectural firms and construction companies to create more robust experiential learning opportunities, such as live project work or practitioner-led workshops.

### CONCLUSION

The study investigates the role of on-site practical learning on the employability skills of architecture graduates from public and private universities in the KRG. It uses a mixed-methods approach, including graduate surveys, interviews with industry professionals, and department heads, to understand the gap between academic preparation and professional expectations in the region.

The evidence strongly indicates that while architecture department curriculum in the region provides a foundational theoretical and conceptual education, they often fall short in

equipping graduates with the technical proficiency, workplace adaptability, and interpersonal competencies required in today's competitive job market. Notably, only 49.2% of surveyed graduates were employed, and of those, just a third was engaged in core architectural roles. This highlights a critical gap between curriculum outputs and labor market needs, leading many graduates to seek employment in peripheral fields. However, the statistically significant inverse correlation between skill gaps and employment status confirms that on-site practical learning deficits are not just a narrative; they are also materially that impact employment outcomes.

Industry professionals have emphasized the "practice shock" experienced by new graduates, who struggle with applying theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts, collaborating across multidisciplinary teams, and managing professional responsibilities. They advocate for longitudinal, distributed internships early in the academic program, along with stronger engagement between universities and architectural firms, to generate substantive professional growth.

Department heads interviews also covered systemic issues, such as uneven practical module implementation among universities, logistical difficulties planning field trips, a little industry cooperation. Even though most department members have work experience, institutional inertia and a lack of funding have prevented this from fully translating into curriculum integration of modern practice.

Considering these conclusions, the study makes several specific recommendations. To close the gap between architectural education and industry demands in the Kurdistan Region, a multifaceted reform strategy is necessary, starting with a thorough curriculum overhaul that formally incorporates structured on-site practical learning throughout all 5 academic years. This includes incorporating real-world projects and insights from. At the same time, universities must establish enduring partnerships with architectural firms, construction companies, and municipal planning bodies through joint studios, practitioner-led lectures. Efforts should be supported by a regionally coordinated framework to standardize internship requirements, duration, and learning outcomes, ensuring equitable practical exposure for all students. Finally, policy advocacy with government bodies, the Engineering Syndicate, and accreditation agencies, such as Bologna Process authorities can institutionalize these practices within broader higher education quality frameworks, creating systemic, sustainable change that aligns academic training with industry demands.

The Kurdistan Region is uniquely positioned to lead transformative changes in architectural education, given its ongoing urban development. However, this potential can only be realized through deliberate, sustained efforts to bridge the gap between academic instruction and professional practice. By repositioning on-site practical learning from a peripheral

activity to a central pillar of architectural education, universities in the region can produce graduates who are employable.

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