

Learning Outcomes Assessment for Students of International Studies: Situation and Solutions

¹Dr. Phan Thi Yen, ²Dr. Dang Vinh

¹University of Foreign Languages Studies, The University of Danang, Viet Nam

²Vietnam - Korea University of Information and Communication Technology, The University of Danang, Viet Nam.

ABSTRACT: The goal of education in Vietnam during the current period is to actively integrate and improve the quality of university education. Assessing learning outcomes is a key issue that attracts the attention of institutions, employers, researchers, social organizations, and learners alike. This assessment provides a foundation for developing and adjusting educational curricula to meet societal demands. Students' output capacity reflects the results of the education and training process at universities. Due to global competitive trends, universities focus on training qualified and competitive human resources to engage in the international labor market. International Studies students are educated in a multidisciplinary field, and therefore, assessing learning outcomes is considered essential for confirming the quality of human resources produced by this educational program.

KEYWORDS: Evaluate; Output capacity; International Studies; Competence assessments; Education quality.

I. INTRODUCTION

The assessment of learners' competencies is a crucial stage in the educational process. It is not only the final step of the teaching process but also the beginning of a new, higher level of development. Recognizing the importance of this, the Ministry of Education and Training has issued documents guiding the development and announcement of graduation standards for academic programs, aiming to ensure the quality of education and meet societal demands. One of the key criteria for evaluating the quality of education at institutions is the extent to which it meets societal requirements. To assess the alignment of educational outcomes with societal needs, institutions should conduct surveys and evaluations through employers - those who directly utilize the products of education. The assessment can be carried out through various methods, but the most reliable approach is to directly survey labor market users (the graduates) to quantify how well they meet job requirements and societal needs. In today's competitive educational environment, training high-quality human resources to meet societal needs is a core factor, providing a solid foundation for educational institutions. To ensure the quality of graduates, universities have developed specific graduation standards for each program in accordance with the Ministry of Education and Training's guidelines, with particular attention to language proficiency standards for each field. International Studies programs are currently being offered at universities such as the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi University, the University of Foreign Languages - Hue, the University of Foreign Languages - Da Nang University, and the University of Pedagogy in Ho Chi Minh City. Therefore, evaluating the extent to which graduates meet the graduation standards for various job positions is crucial in the current context, ensuring that graduates have the necessary skills to meet the demands of the global labor market.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning outcomes standards: The author Stephan Adam introduced the concept of learning outcomes as "a statement of what learners are expected to know, understand, or be able to demonstrate by the end of the learning process" (Adam Stephen, 2006). Author Gloria Rogers (2003) stated that the learning outcomes are "a statement describing what students know or can do after studying at the school. If students achieve those output results, the school has succeeded in its educational goals". Because the learning outcomes are the expected results of the training process, each training program has developed CDRs to announce to learners before starting the training process. The Ministry of Education and Training has also issued documents on the development of learning outcomes, publicizing training quality commitments, and conditions for ensuring educational quality. In 2010, implementing the core tasks of higher education, universities and colleges organized the development and announcement of learning outcomes for the training majors of the school (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, 2010). Learning outcomes are the confirmation of the expectations and capabilities that a graduate is expected to demonstrate as a result of the training process. Learning outcomes standards (CDR) are regulations that outline the content of professional knowledge, practical skills, technological awareness,

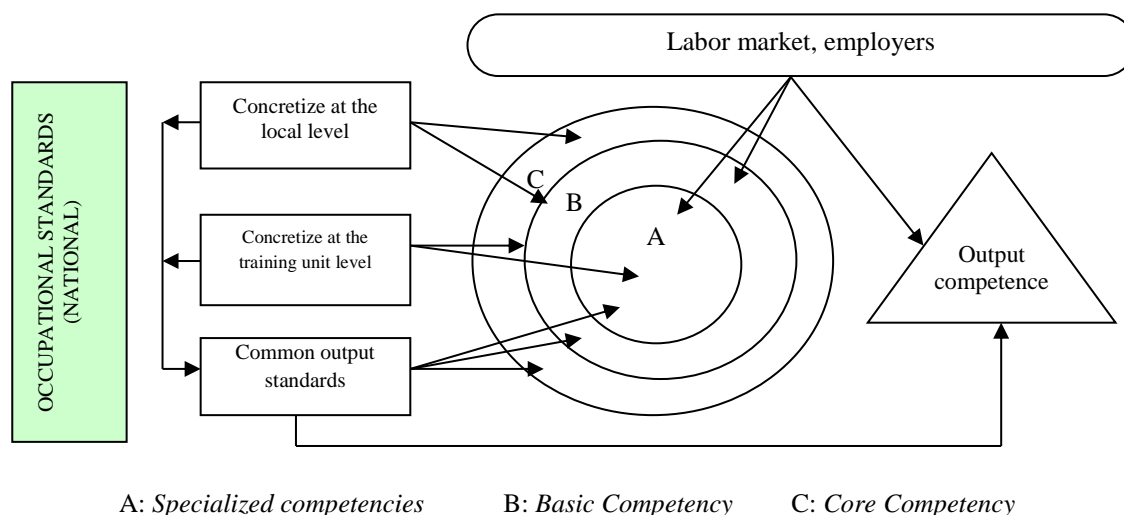
problem-solving abilities, the types of jobs that learners can pursue after graduation, and other specific requirements for each level and field of study.

Output competence: It can be understood that output standards represent the school's commitment to society regarding knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors, thus affirming the specific labor competencies that students will be capable of performing after completing their training at the school. The concept of competence originates from the Latin word 'competentia.' Today, competence is understood in many different ways. It is commonly defined as an individual's proficiency and ability to perform a job. The concept of competence used here pertains to psychology and education. Competence is a complex psychological attribute, shaped by various factors such as knowledge, skills, techniques, experience, readiness to act, and responsibility (Dooley, at al, 2021). Competence is built on a foundation of knowledge, established through values, structured as abilities, formed through experience, reinforced by practice, and realized through will. Additionally, factors such as professional standards, labor market needs, and the employers' requirements at the time (or stage) of program design must also be considered as influencing factors. In some specific cases, 'Professional Standards' can also be interpreted as 'Competencies to be Developed.'

In Vietnam, the concept of competence has also attracted the attention of researchers and society as education undergoes fundamental and comprehensive reforms, shifting from knowledge-based education to competence-based education. This concept is defined in a way that is quite similar to the definitions provided by researchers worldwide. Psychologists argue that competence is a combination of psychological characteristics and attributes of an individual that align with the specific requirements of a particular activity, ensuring that the activity achieves high effectiveness. Competence is also categorized into general/core competence and professional competence. General/core competence is the essential foundational competence necessary for the development of professional competence. Professional competence refers to the specific abilities in particular fields, such as mathematical competence or language competence. However, general/core competence and professional competence is not separate; they are closely related to each other.

Learners' output capacity is formed on the basis of implementing the training process, meeting the requirements of output standards through the formation of specialized capacities, personal capacities and core capacities, modeled in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Output capacity formation structure



Author Tran Khanh Duc, in the study "Research on Needs and Building a Competency-Based Training Model in the Field of Education" clearly stated that competence is 'the ability to harness and comprehensively and effectively apply all human potentials (knowledge, skills, attitudes, physical strength, beliefs, etc.) to perform work or address a specific situation or condition in both personal and professional life (Tran, 2013). In short, output capacity refers to the final expected outcome, which defines the minimum level that learners must achieve in terms of knowledge and professional skills acquired through training. In other words, it consists of regulations concerning professional knowledge content, practical skills, technological awareness, problem-solving abilities, the types of jobs that learners can pursue after graduation, and other specific requirements for each level and field of study.

Assessment of Learning Outcomes : Le et al. (2024) examined and highlighted that the assessment of learning outcomes in social science disciplines plays a crucial role in determining students' ability to apply knowledge in practical settings. The study particularly emphasizes the importance of using diverse assessment methods to ensure that students can meet the job requirements after graduation, while also enhancing the quality of education in these fields. The assessment of learners' learning outcomes is based on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they have acquired after the learning process. In the document "Assessing Training Programs in Vietnam," author Ngo Doan Dai (2008) stated that the purpose of output assessment is to evaluate the quality of the training product. Therefore, the assessment focuses on the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and systemic values of graduates.

Assessing learners' competencies can be done through various methods, such as projects evaluating collaboration skills, communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and language proficiency; through learning records to assess writing abilities; and through tests, interviews, and observations to assess various aspects of learners' capacity. The assessment of learners' output competencies is based on the output standards of each subject and training program that have been communicated to students. Competency-based assessment primarily involves the collection and analysis of information about students' achievements compared to the established objectives. However, for competency-based assessment methods to meet the required quality, teachers must use a variety of assessment forms and tools. If competency is considered the ability to apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes in combination to solve problems in specific contexts, then the curriculum and assessment methods must incorporate all three factors (Robert L. Katz, 1974).

Nguyen (2023) studied the process of developing output standards for higher education programs, emphasizing that these standards must not only address knowledge requirements but also foster the necessary skills in students. This study offers a comprehensive approach to ensuring educational quality and helps institutions adjust their training programs to meet societal needs. The National Economics University (2023) highlighted that output standard evaluation should be based on the actual demands of the labor market. Employers, as the direct users of training products, play a critical role in determining whether graduates are suited for real-world jobs. The study also proposed an approach to help universities evaluate soft skills and teamwork abilities in students. Hoang (2024) examined the use of technology in assessing output standards in higher education. The study proposed online tools and assessment software as effective solutions for educational institutions to monitor and improve the quality of output standards. It shows that technology can reduce errors and provide more accurate information about students' development throughout the learning process.

Pham (2024) explored the relationship between educational quality accreditation and output standards in higher education institutions. The study found that quality accreditation is crucial for maintaining teaching and training standards, while ensuring that graduates are competent to meet the demands of the workplace and society. In conclusion, the assessment of learners' competencies involves self-assessment by learners, assessment by lecturers during the training program, and evaluation by employers. While each country and institution may have different assessment methods, the core aim remains to evaluate the learners' response to the training process in relation to the announced output standards.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

An assessment toolkit was designed, consisting of 4 standards: knowledge, skills, moral qualities, and working and learning capacity. The toolkit includes 20 criteria and 82 indicators used to survey the capacities of 167 students majoring in International Studies from the 2020-2024 cohort at the University of Foreign Languages Studies, University of Da Nang; the University of Social Sciences and Humanities - VNU; and the University of Foreign Languages Studies, University of Hue, prior to graduation. The criteria and indicators were evaluated using the Likert scale, with one indicator on foreign language certificates that did not use a scale, but instead asked about the level of achievement of the types of certificates in accordance with the output standards. The scale applied in this study combines Bloom's and Likert's competency scales, resulting in 5 levels: 1 - Know; 2 - Understand; 3 - Apply; 4 - Practice Proficiency; 5 - Creativity.

Toolkit Processing

Using ConQuest software to evaluate the toolkit, the results showed:

N	167
Mean	213.83
Standard Deviation	55.86
Variance	<u>BIG</u>
Skewness	-0.15
Kurtosis	-1.11

Standard error of mean 4.32
 Standard error of measurement 7.13
 Coefficient Alpha 0.98

The reliability of the scale through the student survey is quite high, however, through analysis, it shows that after removing 2 questions (24. Building and criticizing foreign policies and international relations and 62. Foreign language proficiency), the reliability for the set of criteria reached 0.98.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.984	80

Using SPSS software to test the reliability of that scale, it shows that the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of this scale also reached 0.984. Therefore, all observed variables are accepted and will be used in the next factor analysis.

Consider the distribution of indicators and the number of students responding as shown in Figure 2.

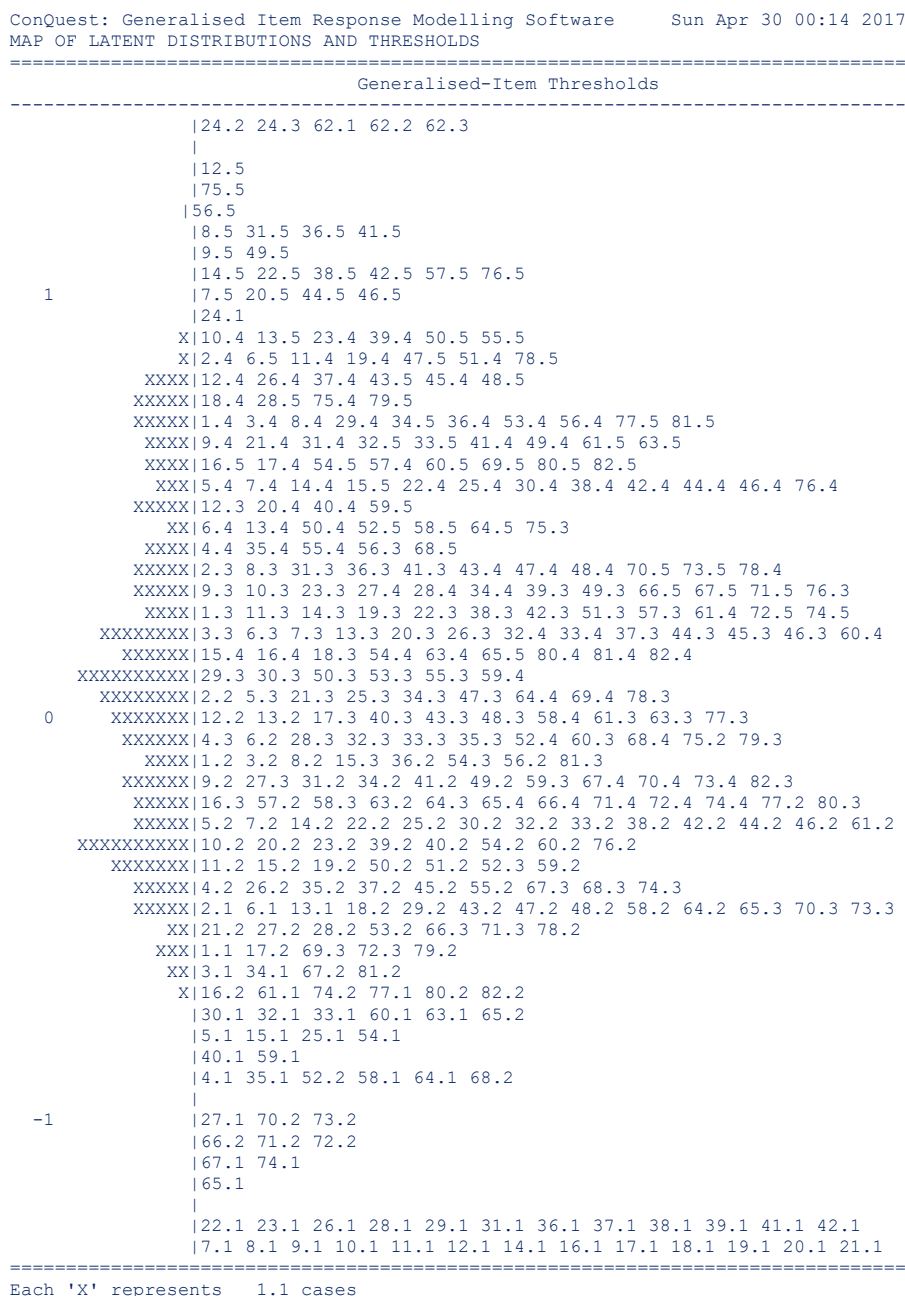


Figure 2. Modeling the level of capacity response

With model 2, it shows that students' abilities are distributed most in groups 2, 3, 4; the remaining number is distributed in groups 1 and 5.

Assessment based on knowledge capacity: Assessment of knowledge capacity is the assessment of the ability to acquire knowledge related to memorizing and reproducing objects and phenomena through the implementation of training programs of the course. The results of students' self-assessment are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of self-assessment of intellectual capacity
\$Tieuchuan1 Frequencies

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
TC1 ^a 1	572	23.4%	373.9%
2	827	33.8%	540.5%
3	707	28.9%	462.1%
4	272	11.1%	177.8%
5	70	2.9%	45.8%
Total	2448	100.0%	1600.0%

a. Group

Regarding the knowledge standard, 23.4% of students said that they only achieved the level of knowing, 33.8% achieved the ability to understand, 28.9% achieved the ability to apply, 11.1% achieved the level of proficient practice and only 2.9% self-assessed the level of creativity. This shows that after completing the International Studies training program, students have a fairly high rate of understanding and applying knowledge, but have not yet achieved the level of proficient practice and creativity.

Assessment based on practical ability : Assessment based on practical competencies is the ability to communicate, debate, organize information, analyze systems, think critically, solve problems and form valuable ideas; Assessment is based on the level of achievement of professional skills, research, and knowledge discovery applied to one's own work. The analysis results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of self-assessment of practical capacity
\$Tieuchuan2 Frequencies

	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
TC2 ^a 1	1067	16.5%	756.7%
2	1792	27.6%	1270.9%
3	2344	36.1%	1662.4%
4	990	15.3%	702.1%
5	293	4.5%	207.8%
Total	6486	100.0%	4600.0%

a. Group

Regarding the skill standards, the results showed that 16.5% of students self-assessed at the level of knowing; 27.6% understanding; 36.1% applying; 15.5% practicing proficiently; 4.5% creative. This proves that after completing the International Studies training program, students have developed skills in applying and have the ability to practice proficiently the skills.

Assessment of Ethical Qualities: Ethical qualities are assessed based on the formation of personal ethics, professional ethics, and social ethics. Self-assessment results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Self-Assessment Results of Ethical Qualities
\$Tieuchuan3 Frequencies

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
TC3 ^a	1	53	3.2%	32.3%
	2	167	10.2%	101.8%
	3	332	20.2%	202.4%
	4	852	52.0%	519.5%
	5	236	14.4%	143.9%
Total		1640	100.0%	1000.0%

a. Group

Students' self-assessment of moral qualities is mostly in the application, proficient practice and creativity groups. Especially for the ethical quality standard, the self-assessment rate in the proficient practice group is 52% and creativity is 14.4%.

Assessment of Employability and Learning Competence: The work and advanced learning competence of students who have completed the Business Administration training program is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Self-Assessment Results of Work and Learning Competence
\$Tieuchuan4 Frequencies

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
TC4 ^a	1	216	16.3%	130.1%
	2	385	29.0%	231.9%
	3	354	26.7%	213.3%
	4	219	16.5%	131.9%
	5	154	11.6%	92.8%
Total		1328	100.0%	800.0%

a. Group

Students majoring in International Studies at the University of Foreign Languages - University of Da Nang and the University of Foreign Languages - Hue University have a two-month internship in various job positions at different workplaces. As a result, the self-assessment rates of work and learning competence in groups 3, 4, and 5 are higher compared to students from the University of Social Sciences and Humanities - Vietnam National University, Hanoi.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The assessment of learning outcomes for students majoring in International Studies needs to be conducted through self-assessment by learners, evaluations by lecturers, and feedback from employers. Survey results indicate that students objectively assess their own competencies across the four key components that shape learning outcomes: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and work and learning competence.

Self-Assessment Results: The competency assessment tool, which has been piloted with students completing the International Studies training program, shows a relatively good distribution of responses for each question, as illustrated in Figure 3.

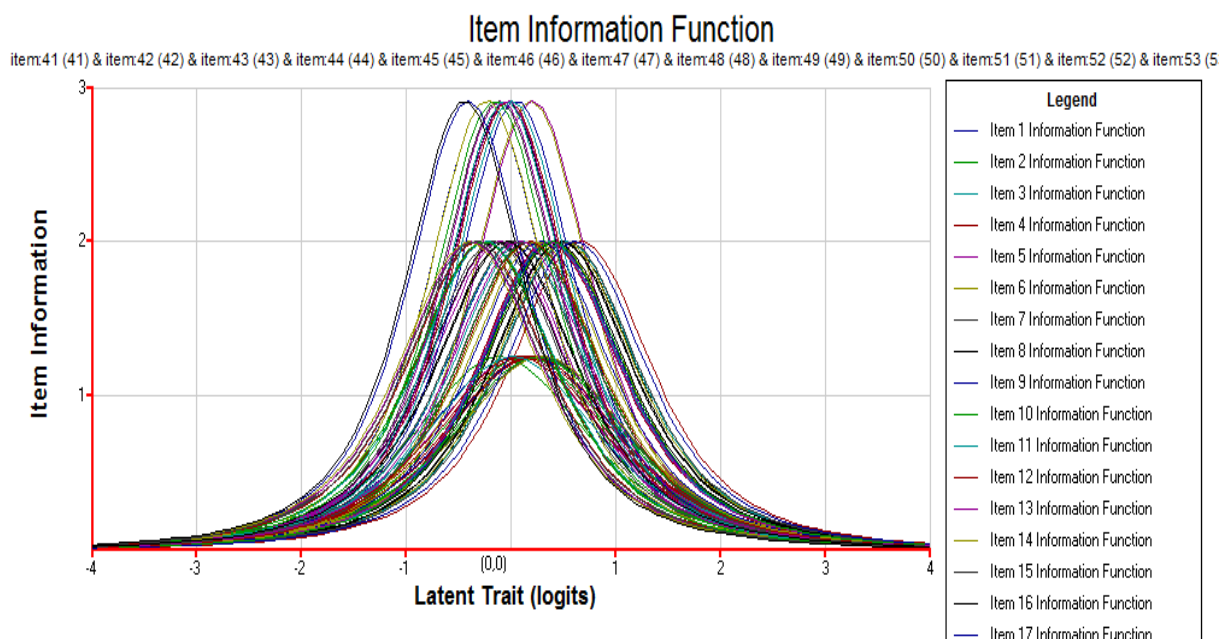


Figure 3. Distribution of Information for Each Question in the Measurement Tool

After removing two questions (24 and 62), the remaining questions exhibit a normal distribution. The scale used in the measurement tool is appropriate for the content and the target group being assessed. For each criterion/indicator, attention should be given to the quality of the courses that contribute to the development of specific competencies for learners.

Academic performance: The quality of students majoring in International Studies who graduated in 2016 is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Graduation Classification Rates of International Studies Students, Class of 2020-2024

University	Total	Excellent (%)	Good (%)	Fair (%)	Average (%)
UD-UFLS	96	1,04	21,92	72,87	4,17
VNU-USSH	54	1,85	40,74	57,41	-
UH-UFLIS	39	-	7,70	87,20	-

Source: Public records of the universities

Based on the accumulated grades and the students' performance points after completing their third year, they are allowed to register for writing a graduation thesis or taking the final specialized courses. The percentage of students who are eligible to write a thesis ranges from 15-20% of the total number of students. Currently, the assessment of students' competencies before graduation in universities is solely based on accumulated grades, performance points, and language proficiency certificates. This method does not provide a detailed evaluation of each student's competencies in relation to the initial goals set.

Comparison of academic performance and self-assessment of learning outcomes : The overall review of students' self-assessment of learning outcomes before graduation shows that a large proportion of students self-assess their abilities in the groups 1-Knowledge and 2-Understanding, as shown in Figure 4.

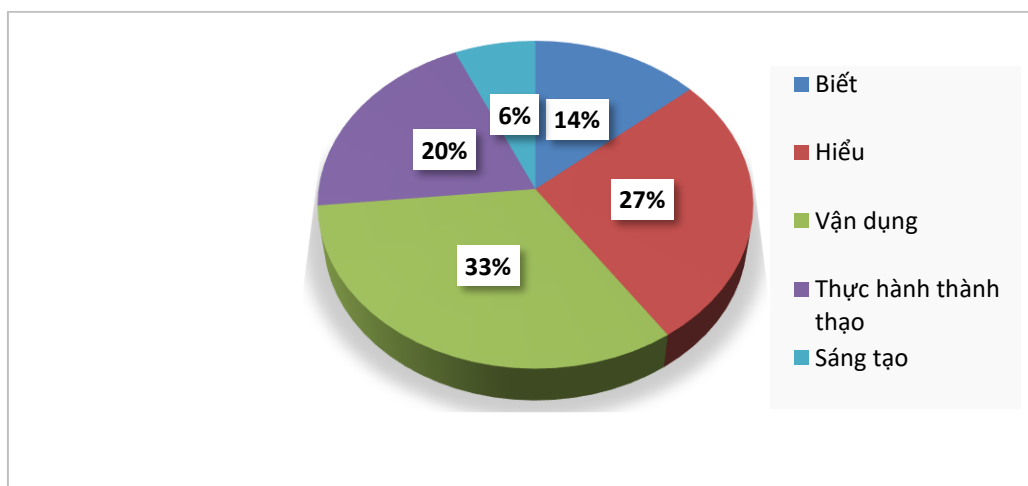


Figure 4. Summary of self-assessment results of learning outcomes by International Studies students.

The survey of expected results for students before graduation (expected to graduate in 2024) shows that 4.19% are classified as excellent, 20.96% as good, 64.67% as fairly good, and 10.18% as average. Comparing the self-assessment results with the expected graduation classification results shows that the students' self-assessment of their abilities aligns fairly well with their expected graduation classifications. The proportion of students achieving the levels of knowledge, understanding, and application is quite high, corresponding to the fairly good and average academic classifications, which are also relatively high. This is quite consistent with the graduation results of students who graduated in 2024.

V. CONCLUSION

Each training program has published its own learning outcomes, and each course within the program also has its own course-specific learning outcomes. Therefore, it is essential to link the course-level learning outcomes with the overall program learning outcomes and create a matrix that aligns both, giving learners the opportunity to engage with and explore these outcomes in depth to develop competencies that meet the expected learning outcomes. For each course, various assessment methods are applied to ensure that learners meet the course's requirements. However, for the program's learning outcomes, students have not yet been systematically evaluated through competency tests or secondary assessments to accurately determine the learner's final competencies.

For each set of criteria used to evaluate the learning outcomes, adjustments should be made to develop appropriate solutions. Specifically:

- ✚ Improve teaching methods to ensure that students enhance their knowledge and competencies;
- ✚ Design courses that focus on developing in-depth specialized knowledge in International Studies, aligned with job roles and career competencies for International Studies students;
- ✚ Strengthen courses that develop skills, especially those that apply knowledge to practical work situations;
- ✚ Improve students' foreign language proficiency in their specialized field by increasing the number of courses taught in foreign languages;
- ✚ Strengthen the relationship between universities and employers in the field of International Studies;

The evaluation of learning outcomes is a process that confirms a learner's competencies against the published learning outcomes. This helps learners self-assess their capabilities, gain confidence in finding employment, and even create jobs. Therefore, throughout the learning process, students should be assigned a series of tasks with different evaluation purposes, ranging from simple to complex. Tasks may include exercises, projects, quizzes, practical work, or essays. The assessment results allow instructors to determine whether or not a student has achieved a specific competency. It is essential that these competencies align with the competency matrix that defines the program's learning outcomes, ensuring that they meet the standards of the training program.

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