

Exploring Public Perceptions of Online Project Management Courses: A Qualitative Analysis of Quora Discussions

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The growing demand for professionals with project management skills and the low success rate of projects have pushed the growth of online project management courses. While these courses offer flexibility and accessibility, concerns arise regarding their credibility and practical effectiveness. This study explores public perceptions of online project management courses through discussions on Quora. Implementing a qualitative approach, 20 relevant questions and 129 responses were collected and analyzed through thematic analysis with LiGRE software. Framing Theory and Expectancy-Value Theory are used to support the interpretation of findings. Results indicate eleven themes, which complement the finding that the majority of respondents viewed certifications as useful for credibility and early career entry but questioned their long-term worth compared to real-life experience and soft skills. The findings suggest that course providers must emphasize practical applications, recognized partnerships, and broader competencies to improve trust and relevance to the working environment. This study contributes by showing how external framing and individual motivations shape learner decisions in online project management education.

Keywords: Career mobility; Credibility; Online project management courses; Perceptions; Quora; Thematic analysis

INTRODUCTION

Project management positions have experienced rapid growth in their demand throughout the last few years. Organizations from various sectors handle increasingly complex projects which require skilled professionals to maintain proper project execution. According to a report from Digital Project Manager, the project success rate is generally low with approximately 70% of projects failing to meet their objectives. This high rate of project failure underscores the importance of developing competent project managers who can improve organizational outcomes.

This has led to a significant increase in demand for competent project managers. The PMI Talent Gap Report predicts that 25 million new project management professionals will become necessary worldwide during the next decade. Project managers play a vital role in organizational success because their importance continues to grow. The high demand for project managers does not prevent numerous projects from failing through delayed completion and cost overruns and unmet objectives. The existing gap between project management needs and capabilities requires enhanced training programs to help managers tackle their current difficulties.

At the same time, online learning has emerged as a leading educational method for professional development. The global online education market is projected to reach \$325 billion by 2025. E-learning platforms provide adaptable learning options at reduced prices which enable students from diverse backgrounds to access educational content they otherwise could not reach through traditional classroom settings (Saeed, Z. A. & Hasoun, M. M., 2023). This flexibility accommodates the time constraints of working professionals which is why there is a surge of professionals that participate in online courses. The courses also promise these professionals to develop useful abilities while obtaining certifications which leads to better career prospects.

The trend of online education and the high demand for competent project managers result in numerous online project management courses being offered. According to Class Central, there are over 4,800 online project management courses available. Platforms like Coursera offer thousands of courses alone, with more than 6,000 beginner-level options as of 2025, while LinkedIn Learning has over 10,000 videos and courses on the subject. The exact number varies depending on the platform and how courses are categorized, but the field has a vast and growing selection of educational offerings.

Despite this growth, concerns remain regarding the credibility and effectiveness of online project management education. (Togas et al., 2021) explain that web-based learning media design elements such as usability and navigation flow and interface clarity and system responsiveness operate as actual learning frameworks which show the fundamental quality and reliability of the system. But questions arise over whether these courses are sufficiently rigorous, whether employers value their certifications, and whether learners gain the practical skills necessary for workplace application.

The increasing popularity of online project management courses leads to a new inquiry about how students perceive these educational programs. However, there is a lack of research on this topic. The advantages presented by providers need to be evaluated through the perspectives of users who have taken these programs. In this digital era, the most common way people share their experiences about these courses is through digital platforms. One of which is Quora. Quora is an online forum that functions like a social network that focuses on discussion in the form of questions and answers. Quora is particularly relevant for this study because it allows professionals and students to

exchange authentic viewpoints that may not surface in formal evaluations, making it a valuable platform for capturing perceptions.

This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing online discussions in Quora to understand how people perceive online courses for project management. The research will be guided by the following questions: What are the benefits and drawbacks of online project management courses, according to online discussions in Quora? The study will use a qualitative approach to explore the themes and patterns that emerge from the data.

The research objective is to explore the benefits and drawbacks of online project management courses, as well as the factors that influence people's perceptions of these courses to identify areas for improvement. This will provide relevant insights for online learning platforms to potentially improve the quality of their courses based on the findings of this study. This study will also provide relevant insights for students or professionals who consider taking online project management courses.

Overall, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on online project management courses by providing a unique perspective on how people perceive these courses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned in the introduction section, the trend of project complexity is increasingly significant across various fields. The increasing project complexity grows stronger in different sectors because of globalization and technological progress and social and political elements. The Yawan high-speed railway project illustrates how technical complexity stands out as the main challenge in international engineering projects because of organizational and technological and environmental factors (Ju & Chen, 2023). IT projects experience rising complexity because of technological progress and multiple stakeholder needs while stakeholder diversity and technological newness emerge as major contributing factors (). The combination of various tools and systems and human elements in projects creates additional complexity which requires flexible management approaches that boost both project resilience and innovation (Adel & Cleveland, 2021; Flores et al., 2024).

The current situation demands project managers who possess the required expertise. Project managers with specialized skills decrease project failure occurrences because organizations that do not value project management experience 67% higher project failure rates (Kalman & Rathet, 2022). The decrease in project failures leads to financial benefits because it minimizes the amount of resources spent on failed initiatives. Project managers who demonstrate high competence levels create better corporate results and management effectiveness which becomes essential for maintaining enduring business success (Lee et al., 2024). The construction industry depends on proper project management techniques which handle risks and stakeholders to prevent delays and cost overruns while delivering better project quality and efficiency (Jaymin-Sanchaniya et al., 2024). On the other side of the coin, the absence of effective project management under inexperienced project managers results in major project setbacks which include budget overruns and project delays that ultimately damage engineering project success (Shabbir, Naveed, & Cheema, 2023; Hefley & Bottion, 2020).

Equally important to the role of project managers is the training method to create skilled project managers. There has been some research on the best approach of training to develop project managers. (Kearney et al, 2024) have found that the development of these competencies can be supported through experiential, active, and reflective

learning methods, which help project managers apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings. Another approach is to create a project management office that helps organizations achieve process standardization and resource sharing which leads to better project governance and enhanced operational efficiency (Kalman & Rathet, 2022). But none has explicitly addressed the effectiveness in training project management skills through online courses.

Online learning is an attractive option for professional development because it is flexible, accessible, and affordable. Yet, there are still issues regarding low completion rates, disengagement, and credibility of assessments (Crane & Comley, 2021). (Alia et al., 2022) also found that student perceptions of the online classes hosted in Zoom platform during the pandemic hinge on usability, interaction affordances, and technical reliability. These challenges beg the question of how much online project management courses give value for the cost in terms of professional recognition and readiness. In project management, education focuses on delivering technical skills. However, other important aspects such as leadership and teamwork, which fall under the heading of interpersonal skills, are still difficult, if not impossible, to teach online.

To understand the users' perceptions of the online program for project managers, social variables from digital discussions on social media platforms, such as Quora, can be considered. The platform design which promotes users to write extensive answers and participate in discussions creates a valuable platform for obtaining multiple perspectives and understanding (Haq et al., 2020). The research on public mental perceptions about deepfake technology proves Quora's value for qualitative studies through its analysis of Quora text data to understand public thinking and mental processes (Caci et al. 2024).

Understanding how professionals judge the credibility and usefulness of online project-management courses requires both a macro-level account of how meanings are constructed in public discourse and a micro-level account of the individual motivational calculus that leads to enrollment, persistence, and credential use. Two main theoretical frameworks were used for this purpose: framing theory and Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT).

The macro-level framework of Framing theory helps researchers understand how digital environments influence student perceptions about online project-management courses. The theory demonstrates how communicative decisions choose to display particular aspects of an issue while hiding other elements to affect how people understand and judge new educational approaches (López-Rabadán, 2022). Students and employers in online education depend on reputation-based signals because they cannot witness teaching methods firsthand so they use platform descriptions and marketing content and testimonials and employer statements to form their opinions (Klein & Amis, 2021). According to (López-Rabadán, 2022), the way teaching innovations gain legitimacy from different stakeholders makes framing theory essential for studying public discussions about online project management in higher education research.

The same researchers from (López-Rabadán, 2022) and (Klein & Amis, 2021) also show that learning opportunity framing directly impacts how students feel about online courses and their willingness to participate. The way courses are presented through "flexible professional upskilling" and "micro-credential pathways" frames makes them seem more valuable and relevant to careers than when they are presented as "low-cost substitutes" for traditional degrees. The way employers frame online credentials affects their acceptance because certain industries now accept them but many employers remain uncertain about team-based and collaborative skills. The conflicting employer perspectives about online courses directly impact student assessments of their value

and practicality which determines their market adoption for professional skill development.

The external meaning construction process described by framing theory lacks complete understanding of what drives learners to make their educational choices. EVT comes into play here and extends this perspective by stating that students choose education based on their belief in success and their personal interest in the learning process (Wang & Xue, 2022). Research shows EVT successfully predicts student engagement and learning persistence and achievement in online learning environments through the combination of expectancy beliefs about success and value assessments including utility and interest and cost (Breetzke & Bohndick, 2024). According to (Wang & Xue, 2022), the cost variables of time and money and reputation risk explain why different learner groups such as mid-career professionals and early-career job seekers respond differently to framing strategies. The research on e-learning satisfaction has proven that convenience and flexibility directly impact student satisfaction when learning remotely which supports EVT's theory about how perceived cost and utility drive adoption behavior (Fozeli et al., 2022). Online project management courses that use flexible learning approaches such as self-paced modules and asynchronous tasks will help students perceive lower costs and greater value which will boost their enrollment intentions and expectancies.

The combination of framing theory with EVT creates a complete model to understand how learners perceive and behave in educational situations. The initial stages of provider and employer framing create credibility and utility and legitimacy indicators which then affect learner success expectations and value perceptions. The combination of employer partnerships and authentic assessment frames in learning materials leads students to believe their education will deliver better career outcomes which strengthens their commitment to enroll and stay in the program and use acquired credentials for job applications (Breetzke & Bohndick, 2024; Wang & Xue, 2022).

This combined framework produces a strong method for studying how Quora users evaluate the effectiveness of online project-management courses because it enables the study to link broad educational discourses with individual motivational elements.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research design used qualitative methods to understand how people view online project management courses. The researchers selected qualitative research because it enables deep exploration of personal opinions and experiences through open discussions on Quora. The research method focuses on interpretation and meaning analysis because it suits the evaluation of educational effectiveness perceptions.

The data collection was done by searching for relevant discussions about online project management courses on Quora which allows users to share their personal experiences and opinions. The search term "Online Project Management Courses" helped identify relevant content about the subject of interest on the platform. The search results produced 33 relevant questions with their accompanying answers and user feedback which were collected for analysis. The researchers applied manual filtering to the collected questions and answers to achieve better dataset quality and focus. The researchers selected 20 questions and their matching answers for analysis after removing posts that lacked clarity or contained repetitive content or technical irrelevance.

Given that the research relied on publicly available online discussions, ethical considerations were carefully addressed. Although Quora discussions are accessible in

the public domain, the study maintained a strict commitment to research ethics by anonymizing all identifiable information. This included the names, occupations, and other personal details of respondents. Anonymization ensured that participants' privacy and confidentiality were respected, thereby aligning with ethical standards in qualitative research.

The thematic analysis is then applied to the data as it represents a standard method for discovering and understanding patterns in qualitative research data. Ligre software is used to perform their analysis because it helps them manage the coding process. The researchers then applied a hierarchical coding system to the responses which included roots for main themes, branches for sub-themes and leaves for specific details. A multi-level coding system is used to identify both general patterns and specific details throughout the dataset.

As mentioned in the literature review, this study used Framework Theory and EVT as theoretical frameworks to analyze its findings. Framework Theory was utilized to structure the analysis of data themes because it helped to maintain systematic and complete results. EVT was also applied to study how online project management courses affect learners' professional growth.

Finally, the conclusions were drawn by synthesizing the thematic findings with the theoretical interpretations to create a complete understanding of Quora users' views about online project management courses and their effectiveness for career development.

RESULTS

Leaf Analysis: Disclosing trends in Online Project Management Course Discourses

Our analysis indicates that the majority of the discourses discussed how the certification obtained through online project management courses helped them add credibility to their CV while believing that real experience outweighed any certificates including the ones obtained from the most prestigious sources as shown in [Figure 1](#) and [Table 1](#).

Figure 1. Leaf Cloud Obtained from LiGRE Software

Short-term return on investment Expensive programs questioned Discounting unrecognized providers Planning Bootcamps Peer respect No link to real performance Coursera/Udemy Certifications as entry requirement Less value placed on certifications Higher cost = higher perceived prestige Industry acknowledgment Hands-on training required Low-cost courses seen as worthwhile PMI Recognition of credible institutions only Risk management Europe – variable employer recognition Real skills outweigh certificates Salary increase Lack of workplace context Google Universities/organizations Bootcamps overwhelming (“fishbowl”) Communication Leadership \$30-\$60 courses not valuable without practice Bootcamps seen as more serious Guided instruction Added credibility Long payback period Seen as resume-padding only People management USA – certifications less valued Helpful for early career entry Real-world practice valued most “Paper PMP” criticisms Reliance on years of practice Execution Depends on industry sector Career mobility Theory seen as insufficient India – certifications highly valued Employers don’t always care Peer/group learning Viewed as superficial achievement Perceived as “entry-level only” Certificates as interview “entry pass” Self-paced learning

Table 1. List of Leaves alongside the Respective Fragments

Leaves	Fragments
Added Credibility	40
Salary increase	7
Career mobility	16
Industry acknowledgement	22
Peer respect	13
Real-word practice valued most	32
Hands-on training required	11
Theory seen as insufficient	16

Lack of workplace context	8
Low-cost courses seen as worthwhile	2
Short-term return on investment	2
Expensive programs questioned	4
Long payback period	7
Self-paced learning	9
Bootcamps	3
Guided Instruction	6
Peer/group learning	2
Paper PMP criticisms	3
Viewed as superficial achievement	7
No link to real performance	10
Seen as resume-padding only	2
PMI	4
Google	4
Coursera/Udemy	2
Universities/organizations	13
Recognition of credible institutions only	6
Discounting unrecognized providers	1
Bootcamps	2
Certifications as entry requirement	4
Reliance on years of practice	4
Less value placed on certifications	4
Communication	9
Leadership	11
People Management	10
Planning	18
Risk Management	9
Execution	13
Not valuable without practice	1
Perceived as "entry-level only"	1
Bootcamps seen as more serious	1
Higher cost = higher perceived prestige	1
Certificates as interview "entry pass"	19
Helpful for early career entry	5
Employers don't always care	8
Real skills outweigh certificates	13
USA	2
India	3
Europe	1
Depends on industry sector	6

Note: Fragments suggest how many times the topic occurs.

Thematic Analysis: Disclosing the discursive threads on Quora on Online Project Management Courses

As our analysis was concluded, we identified 11 themes in regards to our quora threads. The following [Table 2](#) demonstrates all the themes that occurred during our analysis of this project.

Table 2. 11 Themes

	Root
10	Perceived Value of Certification
20	Practical Experience vs Coursework
30	Cost-Benefit Consideration
40	Learning Preferences and Styles
50	Skepticism About Certification Real Worth
60	Recognition & Credibility of Provider
70	Career Stage Considerations
80	Skill development beyond certification
90	Market Perception of Cheap vs Premium Courses
100	Job market relevance
110	Global vs Local Perceptions

Theme 1: Perceived Value of Certification

The first root demonstrates how respondents perceive the overall value of project management certifications, with the conversation revolving around their impact on career development and professional recognition. The data reveals that many participants see certifications as tools for adding credibility to their profiles, with 40 fragments explicitly stating enhanced legitimacy in the eyes of employers and clients. This sense of credibility appears to expand into perceptions of career mobility, as 16 fragments emphasize that certifications help professionals secure promotions, access new roles, or transition into project management from adjacent fields. Salary increase was mentioned less frequently (7 fragments), suggesting that while statistically certifications may contribute to career mobility, their effect on direct financial rewards is not universally acknowledged. Beyond individual career impact, the branch of professional recognition also occurred strongly. Industry acknowledgement (22 fragments) and peer respect (13 fragments) were frequently mentioned by respondents, indicating that certifications play a symbolic role in building trust among colleagues and within the broader industry community. The implication is that certifications are viewed less as guarantees of technical competence and more as legitimizing credentials that indicate commitment, discipline, and recognition within industry norms. However, the uneven distribution of mentions suggests that their perceived value may be more symbolic than practical, and that their benefits might vary depending on context, career stage, and employer preferences.

Theme 2: Practical Experience vs Coursework

The second root highlights a recurring tension between academic learning and workplace practice. Respondents consistently stressed that project management effectiveness comes primarily from real-world experience, with 32 fragments describing real-world practice as more valuable than formal instruction and 11 fragments explicitly calling for hands-on training. The emphasis in this context is that while coursework

provides foundational knowledge for new or experienced project managers, it can not substitute the complexity of actual project execution. Additionally, the limitations of coursework were perpetually mentioned, with 16 fragments suggesting that theory alone is insufficient and 8 fragments criticizing the lack of workplace context in many syllabus/curriculum. This aligns with a skepticism that classroom learning, either online or offline, can capture the realities of managing projects involving people, budgets, risks, and shifting priorities. The implication of this root is significant for learners and employers alike. They may not view certification-based knowledge as sufficient unless it is combined with real-life experience. This finding suggests that certification providers who integrate practical knowledge such as simulations, case studies, or industry projects may enhance graduates to be perceived as more credible. For learners, it also indicates that while certification can be a valuable entry point, their real credibility will still be dependable on their demonstration to manage real projects effectively.

Theme 3: Cost-Benefit Consideration

The third root reflects participants' consideration of certifications through a cost–benefit analysis, weighing financial investment against career outcomes. Interestingly, only a few respondents viewed low-cost courses as worthwhile (2 fragments) or as providing short-term returns on investment (2 fragments). These limited mentions suggest that while affordability is attractive, learners are cautious about associating low price with real value. Contrarily, more responses focused on the challenges of high-cost programs. Four fragments questioned whether expensive certifications or bootcamps are justifiable, and 7 fragments highlighted the concern of long payback periods, where the investment may not directly translate into job opportunities or salary increases. This finding reveals that participants are highly realistic in recognizing the prestige associated with some expensive certifications but remain critical if those credentials do not deliver proportional benefits. This finding also implies two crucial things. First, the price itself is not enough to prevent learners from learning if the courses' core values are shown to them, and second, that certificate providers must carefully proportionate cost structures with evidence of employability acceptance data. For students, this root suggests a cautionary approach: investing heavily in certifications may only be rational when career context or market conditions strongly favor credentialed professionals. Thus, financial calculation becomes a key part of the decision-making process in certification uptake.

Theme 4: Learning Preferences vs Styles

The fourth root captures the differences of learning preferences among respondents, suggesting that there is no single best approach to certification training. Several participants highlighted the advantage of self-paced learning (9 fragments), which allows flexibility and accommodates people with busy schedules, especially for working professionals who are trying to balance study with employment. Bootcamps, as mentioned in 3 fragments, were valued for their intensity and immersion, suitable for learners who prefer learning under structured and fast-paced instructions. Guided instruction, highlighted by 6 fragments, emphasized the importance of mentorship or instructor-led guidance, while peer/group learning (2 fragments) highlighted the social aspect of education, with networking and collaboration seen as complimenting the learning process. The implication of this root is that learners' preferences are not homogenic but rather reflective of individual needs shaped by learning styles, professional backgrounds, and scheduling. Providers that can adapt their delivery models to offer multiple modes, such as combining self-paced modules with interactive sessions to potentially capture the interest of a broader learner base better. For learners, this finding strongly suggests the importance of choosing a format that aligns with personal study habits and professional goals. The data here strengthens the idea of

effectiveness being not only about the content itself but also about the method of delivery and its fit with learner expectations.

Theme 5: Skepticism about Certifications' Worth

The fifth root highlights skepticisms about whether certifications genuinely reflect individual skills/competence. Several respondents considered certifications as superficial achievements, with 3 fragments dismissing them as “paper PMP” and 7 fragments describing them as shallow or insufficient indicators of skill. Moreover, 10 fragments argued that certifications have little-to-no connection to real job performance, suggesting that employers often value real-life skills over formal certifications. An additional 2 fragments described certifications as resume-padding, suggesting that candidates sometimes pursue them to support their applications without proven skill improvement. This skepticism points to a wider concern that certifications may be becoming commoditized, especially in markets where they are considered as “prestige” and easily obtained. The implication is that while certifications can still open doors to job opportunities, the risk of being devalued by employers can be increasingly seen as they are disconnected from workplace realities. For providers, this indicates the importance of ensuring that courses establish real competencies rather than just “giving out” a certificate at the end. For learners, the finding acts as a reminder that certifications alone may not sufficiently provide a competitive edge unless backed by knowledge and real-life experience.

Theme 6: Recognition & Credibility of Providers

The sixth root indicates that not all certifications are perceived equally. Instead, the credibility of institutions issuing these courses heavily influences their value. Responses showed trust in certifications from established universities or professional organizations (13 fragments), while PMI and Google certifications (4 fragments each) were also considered reputable. Coursera and Udemy were mentioned less frequently (2 fragments), suggesting that while popular, they may not carry the same weight in professional contexts. Employer perceptions reinforced this argument through 6 fragments which highlighted that only credentials from recognized institutions are respected, while 1 fragment implied that unrecognized providers are often disregarded entirely by employers. The implication is that employees must consider not only the syllabus or curriculum of the course, but also the reputation of the provider, as employers tend to hire people with proven credibility. This root also underscores a kind of hierarchy in certification legitimacy, where reputation of the institutions acts as the top of this hierarchy of professional recognition. For providers, this indicates the importance of partnerships with credible institutions or accreditation bodies, as credibility may be crucial in shaping both learner enrollment and employer acceptance rates.

Theme 7: Career Stage Considerations

The seventh root emphasizes that the perceived value of certifications is not consistent but heavily depends on the career stage. Beginners were more likely to view certifications as essential entry points, with 2 fragments referencing bootcamps as fast-tracked preparation and 4 fragments framing certifications as necessary to meet entry requirements. Contrarily, most experienced professionals described certifications as less critical, as indicated by 4 fragments pointing to reliance on years of practice and another 4 suggesting reduced value placed on formal credentials. These diverse responses indicate that certifications are perceived as transitional tools as they are useful for building credibility at the start of a career but gradually lose their importance as real-life experience accumulates. The implication is that certification providers may find a larger market among people new to project management, while experienced professionals may be less interested unless courses offer specialized or advanced learning. For individuals, the findings imply that timing is of essence in this matter. The strategic pursuit of

certifications at early career stages may possibly offer greater returns, while later on, professional experience may outweigh formalized credentials.

Theme 8: Skill Development beyond Certifications

The eighth root changes the focus from certification to skill development, showing that respondents recognize the importance of competencies that go beyond formal coursework. Soft skills such as communication (9 fragments), leadership (11), and people management (10) were consistently mentioned as significant to project success. At the same time, technical and managerial skills like planning (18 fragments), risk management (9), and execution (13) were also emphasized. The distribution of fragments suggests a balance. While technical competencies remain essential, respondents view interpersonal and leadership skills as equally critical for effective project management. The implication is that certifications which fail to address these wider skills put themselves at risk of being perceived as incompetency. For providers, this means that integrating modules on communication, leadership, and stakeholder management along with technical training may increase the perceived value of their respective programs. For learners, the findings indicate the importance of going beyond certification by continuously developing transferable skills that contribute to long-term career effectiveness and adaptability.

Theme 9: Market Perception of Cheap vs Expensive Courses

The ninth root focuses on the perceptions of course pricing and the way cost shapes perceived legitimacy of the online courses. Although data was limited in this category, responses managed to sufficiently highlight clear distinctions. Cheap courses were often dismissed as lacking value, with 1 fragment labeling them as ineffective without practical application and another describing them as only suitable for entry-level learners. Conversely, premium options such as bootcamps were seen as more serious (1 fragment) and prestigious (1 fragment), with higher cost interpreted as a signal of quality and commitment. The implication suggests that pricing acts not just as an economic factor but also as a symbolic marker of credibility. This suggests that learners and employers may use cost as a factor to judge the seriousness of a program. However, with only a few fragments available, the evidence remains limited, and broader conclusions should be drawn cautiously. Still, the theme points to an underlying assumption that “you get what you pay for” as mentioned by one of the responders, may influence both learners’ willingness to invest and employers’ perception of a credential’s worth.

Theme 10: Job Market Relevance

The tenth root focuses on the relationship between certifications and employability. Several respondents viewed certifications as useful tools for getting called in for interviews (19 fragments) or helping early career entry (5 fragments). However, others questioned their actual value, with 8 fragments stating that employers may not always care about credentials and 13 fragments emphasizing that real skills always outweigh certificates. The combination of optimism and skepticism indicates the double-edged sides of certifications. While they can act as an initial filter in the eyes of employers or entry pass for future employees, they do not necessarily guarantee employment or advancement. The implication suggests that certifications should be considered as one piece of a complex employability probability, treating it as a supporting tool rather than an endpoint. For providers, this root underlines the importance of aligning certification programs with employers’ needs to ensure relevance with the current workplace. For employees and future employees, it emphasizes that certifications can present

opportunities but in order to have sustainable career progressions, it depends on proven skills and real-life experience.

Theme 11: Global vs Local Perceptions

The final root illustrates how perceptions of certifications vary across geographic and industry contexts. For additional context, most respondents did not mention their nationalities. But, for those who did, they mentioned several countries which were India, USA and European countries as a whole. In the USA, 2 fragments suggested that certifications hold limited recognition, while in India, 3 fragments highlighted their strong influence on professional context. Europe showed mixed recognition (1 fragment), while 6 fragments noted that the value often depends on the specific industry sector. This geographic variation suggests that the value of certifications is not universal but cultural and contextual. For example, markets with strong formal credentialing traditions may place higher weight on certifications, while others may prioritize demonstrable skills and experience. The implication is that employees and future employees must consider not only the general reputation of a certification but also its local recognition and applicability. For providers, these findings highlight the importance of adapting marketing and positioning strategies to regional contexts, ensuring that certifications resonate with local employer expectations and cultural norms.

DISCUSSION

Roots such as Perceived Value of Certification and Recognition & Credibility of Provider emphasize how legitimacy and trust are heavily shaped by external framing. According to Framing Theory, the way institutions and providers present their courses influences whether learners perceive them as credible or superficial (López-Rabadán, 2022). When platforms advertise their courses as being endorsed by reputable organizations such as PMI or universities, potential participants may interpret them as crucial for career advancement. At the same time, skepticism occurs when courses are framed as “cheap” courses, further enhancing the findings that legitimacy often depends on the reputation in digital education (Klein & Amis, 2021). Relatedly, Job Market Relevance and Global vs Local Perceptions demonstrate how employers’ perceptions of these certificates differ across industries and countries, showing deeper observations that external parties’ perspectives help shape the legitimacy of these online project management courses in different contexts (Ju & Chen, 2023; Eftekhari et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, EVT provides a thorough explanation of why individuals choose or reject these courses. Roots such as Cost-Benefit Consideration, Career Stage Considerations, and Learning Preferences and Styles thoroughly demonstrate people’s expectancy (belief in success), value (utility for career mobility or skill development), and cost (time, money, effort). For example, affordable courses are valued by most respondents for their short-term returns, while expensive bootcamps are questioned unless they are able to deliver clear benefits such as long term investments in career mobility. The research further reinforces the finding that learners’ perceptions of online project management courses are heavily influenced by their perceptions of convenience, flexibility, and value against cost and effort (Fozeli et al., 2022; Wang & Xue, 2022). Career stage further affects these perceptions, as job seekers often view these online project management courses and certifications as “entry passes” for interviews, while experienced professionals rely more on practice than these credentials they consider as superficial. (Lee et al., 2024).

Other roots reveal tensions between framing and motivation based on calculated risks and opportunities. Practical Experience vs Coursework, Skepticism About Certification’s

Real Worth, and Market Perception of Cheap vs Premium Courses highlight the concerns among theoretical training not being sufficient to fully prepare learners for workplace challenges, reflecting critiques that project management certifications that certainly must go beyond technical skills, including real-world experiences (Adel & Cleveland, 2021; Flores et al., 2024). Similarly, Skill Development Beyond Certification emphasizes leadership, communication, and people management abilities that are difficult to teach online and require hours of real-life practice (Anderson, 2008), which is in line with PMI's decision for balanced and thorough competencies through its Talent Triangle program (Project Management Institute, 2021).

Overall, the findings suggest that learners' perceptions of online project management courses are heavily influenced both by external framing of credibility and utility, and by individual calculations of success expectancy, cost, and value. This integration of Framing Theory and EVT provides a comprehensive point of view for explaining why some learners are motivated to acquire certifications as credible supporting assets, while others remain skeptical, questioning their relevance, affordability, or skill-transferability (Breetzke & Bohndick, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the value of analyzing public perceptions of online project management courses through qualitative approaches gathered from Quora discussions. By implementing thematic analysis and supported by Framing Theory and Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), the research provides a structured framework for understanding how learners perceive certification credibility, skill development, and career mobility. The findings highlight how external factors such as institutional reputation and employer recognition, along with internal motivational evaluations of cost, value, and expectancy of success, influence attitudes toward online certifications.

The results show that while many learners value certifications for enhancing credibility, career mobility, and signaling professionalism, they remain skeptical about their practical worth compared to real-world experience. Themes such as cost-benefit considerations, recognition of providers, and career stage differences highlight how calculated and considered evaluations shape learner perceptions. Moreover, the emphasis on practical experience and soft skills such as leadership and communication highlights the need for online programs to go beyond theoretical coursework, aligning with PMI's Talent Triangle in emphasizing balanced competencies.

Additionally, the integration of framing theory and EVT to analyze the samples demonstrates how online project management course providers and employers influence learners' decision-making by the syllabus/curriculum relevance and values in professional matters. This double-side perspective demonstrates that online courses are not judged solely on content but also on how credibility and utility are framed, and how learners interpret these frames in relation to their goals, costs, and expectations.

While the findings provide strong insights regarding how online project management courses are perceived by working professionals and job seekers, the findings are limited by the reliance on a single platform (Quora) and a qualitative approach only. Future research could expand this study by combining diverse online platforms, larger datasets, or quantitative analyses to test perception patterns more broadly. Additionally, implementing real-time data collection technologies, such as AI-assisted discourse analysis or sentiment analysis, could further enhance scalability and precision of the results.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature by showing how people's perceptions of online project management courses are shaped through a combination of external framing and internal motivations. The findings provide insights for course developers, educators, and potentially employers to improve the credibility, effectiveness, and market alignment of online project management training. By addressing both symbolic legitimacy and practical skill development, online project management courses can support professional growth and enhance the long-term competitiveness of learners better in the global job market.

LIMITATION

It is crucial to point out the limitations of the research conducted. Firstly, this research was purely conducted using a qualitative method, limiting the analysis to merely understanding people's perceptions without quantifying results such as effectiveness rate to further understand the phenomenon. Second, the data collected merely on Quora could potentially lead to biases in online discourses, such as lack of background information of all the respondents and may not represent a random population sample. Thirdly, of all the initial 28 questions gathered, only 15 questions were chosen with a sum of 129 samples in total which should be sufficient for a small scale thematic analysis project (roughly 100-200 samples). In summary, while this research presents valuable insights, acknowledging all these limitations is essential for interpreting, contextualizing, and generalizing our findings.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

We, Brilliant Fajar Muhammad Thomas, Radiktya Dewanto Cahyolaksono, and Azizah, hereby declared that we have no financial, professional, or personal relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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