WORLD FORUM ON ACADEMIC INNOVATION AND DIGITAL LITERACY

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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WHY ARE SOFT SKILLS IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS?

Abstract. This study explores the development of soft skills among university students and examines their impact on academic performance. It focuses on identifying the level of soft skills and understanding their importance for students' future success. Data were collected using a 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire and five real-life case-based scenarios. The results indicate that most students demonstrate a moderate level of soft skills, while several key areas still require improvement. The study concludes that interactive approaches, such as group work, role-playing, and practical activities, can effectively enhance students' soft skills and improve their overall learning experience.

Keywords: Soft skills, emotional intelligence, communication skills, academic performance, university students, case-based learning, Likert scale questionnaire

Annotatsiya. Ushbu tadqiqot universitet talabalarida soft skills rivojlanishini o‘rganadi hamda ularning akademik natijalarga ta’sirini tahlil qiladi. Tadqiqotning asosiy maqsadi talabalarning soft skills darajasini aniqlash va ularning kelajakdagi muvaffaqiyatidagi ahamiyatini tushunishdir. Ma’lumotlar 20 ta savoldan iborat Likert shkalasiga asoslangan so‘rovnoma va 5 ta real hayotga asoslangan vaziyatlar orqali to‘plandi. Natijalar shuni ko‘rsatdiki, talabalarning aksariyati soft skills bo‘yicha o‘rtacha darajaga ega, biroq ayrim muhim yo‘nalishlarda rivojlanish zarur. Tadqiqot



xulosasiga ko‘ra, guruh ishlari, rol o‘ynash va amaliy mashg‘ulotlar kabi interaktiv yondashuvlar soft skillsni samarali rivojlantirishi mumkin.

Kalit so‘zlar: Yumshoq ko‘nikmalar, emotsional intellekt, muloqot ko‘nikmalari, akademik natijadorlik, universitet talabalari, vaziyatga asoslangan o‘qitish, Likert shkalasi so‘rovnomasi

Аннотация. Данное исследование изучает развитие мягких навыков (soft skills) у студентов университета и анализирует их влияние на академическую успеваемость. Основная цель исследования — определить уровень мягких навыков у студентов и понять их значение для будущего успеха. Данные были собраны с помощью анкеты из 20 вопросов по шкале Лайкерта и пяти сценариев, основанных на реальных жизненных ситуациях. Результаты показали, что большинство студентов обладают средним уровнем мягких навыков, однако некоторые ключевые области требуют дальнейшего развития. Исследование показывает, что интерактивные методы, такие как групповая работа, ролевые игры и практические задания, могут эффективно развивать мягкие навыки у студентов.

Ключевые слова: Мягкие навыки, эмоциональный интеллект, коммуникативные навыки, академическая успеваемость, студенты университета, кейс-метод обучения, анкета по шкале Лайкерта

INTRODUCTION

In today’s competitive world, employers do not only focus on academic knowledge but they also value: how well a graduate communicates, how well they work in a team, how they solve problems and manage responsibilities. Many studies show that students with strong soft skills are more successful in their careers, even if their technical knowledge is average. Therefore, developing soft skills in higher education has become a key priority.

BACKGROUND

Soft skills are important personal abilities that help people communicate clearly, work together and handle challenges at work. In an increasingly complex job market, the importance of these skills cannot be overstated. Soft skills include abilities such as teamwork, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and strong communication. All these qualities play a crucial role in ensuring that individuals not only perform their tasks effectively but also work harmoniously with others. Employers are looking for candidates who can not only execute their job responsibilities but also contribute positively to the workplace culture (Ioseb Gabelaia, 2020)[1].



In modern higher education, academic knowledge alone is not just sufficient soft skills can be taught in a range of ways, and some schools and universities organize specific courses and activities to teach them. Other educational institutions incorporate soft skills into regular lessons. The specific approach to teaching soft skills is shaped by the theoretical background, the vision, and the purpose of the lesson and specific activity (Cinque, 2015)[2].

Educators who believe soft skills are essential for applying what is learning in core academic subjects often view soft skills development as complementary to instruction in core academic subjects.(Gaines &Mohammed 2010)[3]. According to

[1] (Ioseb Gabelaia, 2020). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383021456 Soft Skills and Their Impact on the Workplace

[2] (Cinque, 2015). 1. Soft Skills in Education: The role of the curriculum, teachers, and assessments .https://share.google/s8IRtzKFEx2wX1Psd

[3] (Gaines & Mohammed, 2010). 1. Soft Skills in Education: The role of the curriculum, teachers, and assessments 1. https://share.google/s8IRtzKFEx2wX1Psd

Gaines and Mohammed, these educators tend to praise schools that demonstrate "a balanced approach" because they produce graduates who " have both sound content knowledge and the ability to apply that knowledge successfully". Regardless of the embedded and integrated approach adopted, according to Wickson, at el (2006)[4] it is crucial for learners to develop the ability "to fuse knowledge from different disciplines and engage with stakeholders in the process of generating knowledge".

Moreover, the cultural context of soft skills development cannot be overlooked. Research indicates that different regions may emphasize varying aspects of soft skills based on local educational values and workplace expectations. For example, in China, educators emphasize cooperation and harmony in team settings, reflecting traditional values intertwined with modern educational practices (Tetiana Pohorielova & Zang Lei, 2024)[5].

OBJECTIVES

This study aims to:

- Examine the importance of soft skills in academic and professional contexts.
- Assess the level of soft skills among university students.
- Identify key strengths and weaknesses in students' soft skills based on questionnaire and case-based responses.
- Explore effective strategies for improving soft skills in higher education.

METHODOLOGY

[4] (Wickson) at el, 2006. Soft Skills in Education: The role of the curriculum, teachers, and assessments 1. https://share.google/s8IRtzKFEx2wX1Psd

[5] (Tetiana Pohorielova&ZangLei, 2024). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/383021456 Soft Skills and Their Impact on the Workplace

This study employed a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection. Quantitative data were gathered using structured questionnaire and qualitative insights came from case-based scenarios. This approach provided a comprehensive view of students' soft skills.

The study included 15 university students from the XTA-IU-25 group. Although the number of students is small, it allows for detailed analysis of responses. Data was collected in a single session. Students completed the survey in 20 minutes, from 8:45 to 9:05. Participation was voluntary, and responses were collected anonymously in order to ensure honesty and reliability.



Instruments

1. Soft Skills Inventory (SSI) Questionnaire

This 20-item questionnaire measured various soft skills, including:

- communication skills
- emotional intelligence
- adaptability
- teamwork
- stress and conflict management

Each item was rated on a 5-point Likert scale:

1 – Strongly disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – Neutral

4 – Agree

5 – Strongly agree

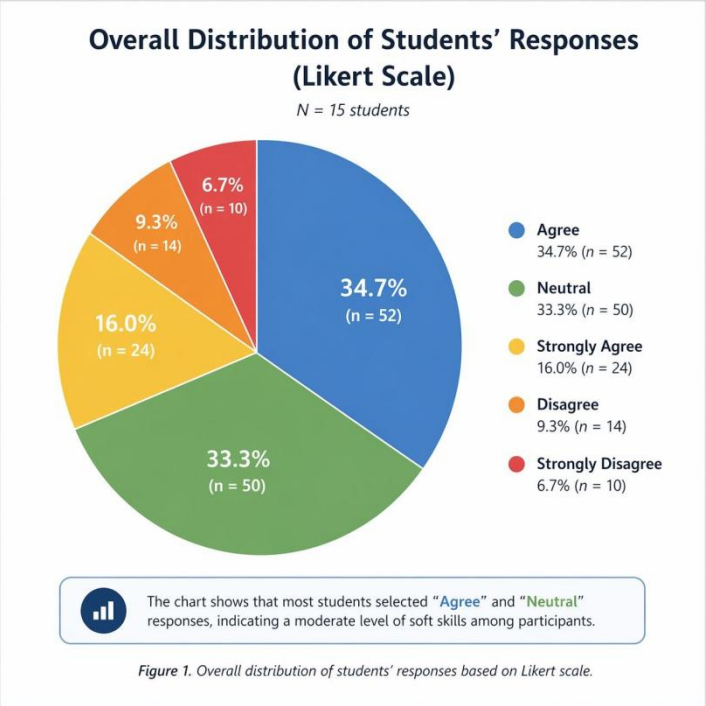


Figure 1. Overall distribution of students' responses based on Likert scale.

2. Case-Based Scenarios

Students received 5 real-life scenarios related to soft skills, such as:

- group work conflict
- misunderstanding
- adapting to a new environment
- giving feedback
- handling disagreement

Open-ended responses were collected for qualitative analysis to identify common patterns and behavioral tendencies.

DATA ANALYSIS. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, primarily percentage distributions. Responses from the questionnaire were categorized by Likert scale to identify trends in perceptions. Qualitative responses from the cases were grouped into themes like communication, avoidance, assertiveness, and colloboration, which make it easier to support and explain the quantitative results.

RESULT. The findings of this study are based on responses from 15 students who completed a 20-item Soft Skills Inventory (SSI) questionnaire and 5 case-based scenarios. The data were analyzed using percentage distributions and descriptive statistics.

Overall Response Distribution

The response patterns indicate that:

- About 45–50% of responses fall under Agree (4)
- Approximately 30–35% are Neutral (3)
- Around 10–15% are Strongly Agree (5)
- A smaller portion, 10–20%, selected Disagree (1–2)

This suggests that students generally exhibit moderate confidence in their soft skills, tending to avoid extreme responses.

Communication Skills

Results demonstrate that students' communication abilities are moderately developed. For instance, almost 40% feel they can easily begin conversations with people they are not familiar with, while about 33% find it



GROUP WORK SCENARIOS

1 CASE 1: Group Work Conflict
Vaziyat: Siz guruh bilan loyiha qilyapsiz. Guruhdagi bir talaba umuman ishlamayapti, lekin yakunda baho olishni xohlaydi. Boshqalar esa bundan norozi.
Savol: Siz qanday yo'l tutasiz?

2 CASE 2: Misunderstanding
Vaziyat: Do'stingiz siz aytmagan gapni boshqalarga noto'g'ri yetkazdi va siz haqingizda noto'g'ri fikr paydo bo'ldi.
Savol: Siz vaziyatni qanday hal qilasiz?

3 CASE 3: New Environment
Vaziyat: Siz yangi universitega keldingiz. Hech kimni tanimaysiz va guruhda o'zingizni noqulay his qilyapsiz.
Savol: Qanday qilib ijtimoiylashasiz?

4 CASE 4: Giving Feedback
Vaziyat: Do'stingiz prezentatsiya qildi, lekin juda sust chiqdi. U sizdan fikr so'radi.
Savol: Qanday feedback berasiz?

5 CASE 5: Conflict in Discussion
Vaziyat: Darsda bahs ketmoqda va kimdir sizning fikringizni keskin rad etdi.
Savol: Qanday javob berasiz?

SSI QUESTIONNAIRE

Ko'rsatma: 1–Strongly disagree | 2–Disagree | 3–Neutral | 4–Agree | 5–Strongly agree

1. I can easily start a conversation with strangers (1 2 3 4 5)
2. I understand other people's emotions quickly (1 2 3 4 5)
3. I can control my emotions in difficult situations (1 2 3 4 5)
4. I enjoy interacting with new people (1 2 3 4 5)
5. I can tell when someone is uncomfortable (1 2 3 4 5)
6. I adapt my behavior depending on the situation (1 2 3 4 5)
7. I express my feelings openly (1 2 3 4 5)
8. I am sensitive to others' moods (1 2 3 4 5)
9. I stay calm when I am under pressure (1 2 3 4 5)
10. I feel confident speaking in front of others (1 2 3 4 5)
11. I can understand non-verbal cues (1 2 3 4 5)
12. I change my communication style when needed (1 2 3 4 5)
13. I openly share my opinions (1 2 3 4 5)
14. I notice small emotional changes in others (1 2 3 4 5)
15. I can hide my emotions when necessary (1 2 3 4 5)
16. I actively participate in group discussions (1 2 3 4 5)
17. I easily understand social situations (1 2 3 4 5)
18. I behave differently in formal and informal settings (1 2 3 4 5)
19. I am comfortable working in teams (1 2 3 4 5)
20. I manage conflicts effectively (1 2 3 4 5)

challenging. Confidence in public speaking is limited, because 40% chose neutral responses and no one selected "strongly agree." However, roughly 60% reported that they can openly express ideas, are more comfortable with communicating in familiar settings more than in unfamiliar or formal situations. As for misunderstanding, responses were mixed: about 40% chose direct communication, while others preferred avoidance or distancing themselves from the person. In a new environment, around 80% of students reported that they would try to socialize, which shows their strong adaptability. In feedback situations, the majority (60%) preferred proving a constructive and supportive feedback. In discussion conflicts, about 50% of students showed a tendency to strongly defend their opinions, while others responded more calmly or emotionally.

Emotional Intelligence.

Emotional intelligence appears to be a relatively strong skill for students. Around 80% can quickly feel others' emotions, and roughly 73% say they can control their reactions when necessary. However, confidence in emotional expression is lower, with only 40% agreeing they openly share feelings, while 33% disagree. Also, only 40% notice minor emotional changes in others. This indicates students understand and manage emotions well but are less confident in expressing or noticing small emotional cues.

Case-Based Analysis

In addition to questionnaire results, the case-based analysis helps to better understand how students respond to real-life situations. In group conflicts, about 60% prefer to communicate and cooperate, while fewer focus on fairness or avoid conflicts completely. When it comes to misunderstanding, responses were mixed: about 40% chose direct communication, while others preferred avoidance or distancing themselves from the person. In a new environment, around 80% of students showed a tendency to socialize actively, indicating strong adaptability. In feedback situations,

the majority (60%) preferred a constructive and supportive approach. In discussion conflicts, about 50% of students chose to strongly defend their opinions, while others responded more calmly or emotionally.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that university students generally have a moderate level of soft skills. Many students are good at adapting to different situations, working in teams, and understanding others' emotions. This suggests that they can function well in social and academic environments.

However, some important weaknesses were also identified. Particularly, students find it difficult to manage stress and express their emotions. Many of them struggle to stay calm under pressure or handle emotionally challenging situations. This may be because students do not often face real-life situations where these skills are required. Another interesting result is the high frequency of neutral responses in the questionnaire. This indicates that students may not be fully confident about their abilities. In other words, they might have the skills, but they are unsure about applying them in practice. The case-based scenarios also support these findings. While many students prefer communication and cooperation, some tend to avoid conflict or defend their own opinions. This shows that students still need to develop a better balance between listening to others and expressing their own ideas. It is also true that cultural and educational factors may influence students' behavior. In some contexts, students may be encouraged to avoid conflicts or not express their opinions openly. Finally, this study has some limitations too. The number of participants is small, and limited to one group. For that reason, the results cannot be generalized to all students.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to evaluate the soft skills levels among university students by using a questionnaire and case analysis. Results show students generally possess a moderate level of soft skills, with some areas more developed than others. Notably,

they demonstrate relatively high adaptability, teamwork, and emotional understanding, which indicates that they are able to work effectively in social and collaborative settings. These skills are crucial for both academic achievement and future careers. However, the study identified weaknesses in stress management, emotional expression, and public speaking confidence, because many students struggle to stay calm under pressure and hesitating to express their emotions openly. An important finding is the high number of neutral responses, which means that students are not fully confident in their soft skills rather than simply lacking them. In conclusion, students have a basic level of soft skills but they need more practical experience as well as interactive learning activities such as role-plays, group works to strengthen and using these skills effectively and handle real-world challenges.

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4. (Wickson) at el, 2006. Soft Skills in Education: The role of the curriculum, teachers, and assessments 1. https://share.google/s8IRtzKFEx2wX1Psd

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