Workplace Requirements and the Instruction of Soft Skills in Higher Education: A Case Study of Management Techniques Students

Insaf Khoudri
ENS Meknes, Moulay Ismail University
insaf.khoudri@edu.umi.ac.ma

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Abstract
To meet the demands of the 21st century, integrating soft skills into educational settings is deemed essential. However, employers often assert that many recent graduates lack the skills needed to adapt to workplace requirements. With this concern in mind, the present paper seeks to evaluate the disparities between the skill sets desired by employers and those provided to students. A quantitative research approach was utilized to accomplish this objective, employing a questionnaire to collect data from 412 Moroccan university students specializing in Management Techniques (MT) at the School of Technology in Meknes. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25, and the research hypotheses were examined using the One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. According to the results of the hypotheses, students exhibit a high level of soft skills, and the instructional methods utilized in university education appear to align closely with workplace expectations and recruiter needs. However, the study suggests that outcomes may vary across different faculties, indicating the necessity for further investigation in this area.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the role of higher education becomes crucial in preparing learners to emerge as more engaged and self-reliant individuals and accountable members of society. Consequently, it undergoes a transformative shift due to alterations in educational programs, scientific advancements, technological progress, and industrial progress (Alwadai, 2023) among others. Essentially, in today's competitive employment landscape, securing and retaining a job necessitates possessing appropriate employability skills (Adams, 2007; Shafie & Nayan, 2010). Indeed, possessing the appropriate skills can be pivotal, particularly during critical times (Prentiss, 2021). Today's workers enjoy unparalleled access to programs that impart fresh and pertinent job competencies (Jaiswal et al., 2022), with future employees being urged to deeply cultivate and capitalize on those competencies that are not easily replicable by artificial intelligence or machines (Black & Van Esch, 2020).

Recently, the expanding populace has triggered numerous educational challenges such as overcrowded schools, inadequate workforce, and scarcity of learning materials and elucidative resources (Alwadai, 2023). The necessity for soft skills holds significance for the success of graduates from institutions of higher learning (Williams, 2015). Soft skills have emerged as a contentious subject and have evolved into a prerequisite in the professional sphere, particularly amidst the era of globalization. In essence, university graduates, for instance, must adeptly acquire an array of soft skills before embarking on job applications, encompassing communication, collaboration, leadership, and problem-solving, among others (Elouaali et al., 2024). Therefore, it is imperative to integrate and infuse soft skills within the educational syllabus to empower the youth to seamlessly transition into the job market. As evidenced by research, adults are deemed pivotal entities in the shaping of modern society due to their physical and intellectual capabilities. Nonetheless, in actuality, a majority of adults find themselves unable to harness their potential effectively owing to the dearth of guidance and motivation (Alwadai, 2023).

To propel Morocco towards becoming a developed nation, institutions of higher education must assume a pivotal role in cultivating a proficient workforce imbued with a top-tier mindset (Moustadraf, 2021). The recent reform in Morocco underscores the imperative of integrating soft skills into education, and the new strategic vision (2015-2030) further accentuates the significance of incorporating soft skills into the Moroccan curriculum (Elouaali et al., 2024). Additionally, in 2022, the Moroccan Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research initiated reforms in the university system aimed at integrating soft skills to enhance the quality of higher education in the kingdom and bolster graduate employability (Moustadraf, 2021).

In reality, the global challenge for most graduates lies in the pursuit of employment, primarily due to a deficiency in essential soft skills. When recruiting graduates, a notable discrepancy in soft skills is often observed between university graduates and the requirements of companies, attributed to the high competency levels demanded by industries (Pai & Mayya, 2022). Nearly all graduates lack the requisite combination of skills, resulting in impressive academic credentials overshadowed by the absence of soft skills development (Amantay & Ermakov, 2021). Soft skills have been identified as paramount in academia, receiving heightened attention from organizations seeking graduates with employable competencies (Jaaffar et al., 2016). The absence of soft skills in curricula is attributed to a lack of awareness and insufficient teacher training. Certain studies advocate for explicit instruction in soft skills, placing particular emphasis on competencies such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, emphasizing the importance of all soft skills for the success of new graduates in their future endeavors. Elouaali et al. (2024) posit that there is a paucity of research

conducted on the teaching and learning of soft skills in Morocco, highlighting the need for further investigation in this area. Having this in mind, this paper intends to assess the disparities between the skill sets desired by employers and those imparted to students.

1.1. Research Questions

To achieve the purpose of this paper, the study aims to answer two main questions:

1) What is the proficiency level of Moroccan University Management Techniques learners in soft skills?

2) Do teachers or the university curriculum integrate soft skills into their teaching methods?

1.2. Research Hypotheses

H_0: It is hypothesized that university learners' level of soft skills is low

H_a: It is hypothesized that university learners' level of soft skills is high

H_0: It is hypothesized that the university curriculum inadequately addresses the teaching of soft skills to students.

H_a: It is hypothesized that the university curriculum adequately teaches soft skills to students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition of soft skills

Rao (2014) asserts that the term soft skills was initially mentioned in 1972 but gained widespread usage only in the early 1990s, despite the existence of these skills in various forms. Moss and Tilly (2004) define soft skills as qualities, traits, and abilities related to personality, attitude, and behavior rather than formal or technical knowledge. In this regard, Choudary and Ponnuru (2015) describe soft skills as a broad category encompassing behaviors that facilitate effective interpersonal interaction and collaboration. In essence, soft skill training holds significance due to its absence from academic curricula aimed at preparing students for managerial roles. Likewise, Aldulaimi (2018) emphasizes the crucial role of soft skills in determining project success and organizational performance. For example, effective leadership hinges on the ability to inspire, lead, motivate, and develop others; lacking these skills can hinder a leader's effectiveness and undermine employees' morale (Choudary and Ponnuru, 2015).

According to Gilyazova et al. (2021), there exists a variety of definitions and classification methods for soft skills, with the term often used interchangeably with labels such as "21st-century skills" or "future work skills 2020." Furthermore, life skills play a significant role, in bridging the gap between basic functioning and capabilities, strengthening individuals' ability to meet present-day societal demands and needs. These skills not only enhance academic performance but also improve employability, enabling learners to succeed in both educational and professional environments.

2.2. Classification of life skills

According to experts in the field (Raitskaya & Tikhonova, 2019), soft skills are commonly categorized into 2-3 clusters. In this sense, Gilyazova et al. (2021) highlight three prevalent clusters in most classifications: (1) social and communicative skills (including communicative skills, interpersonal skills, teamwork and leadership, social intelligence, responsibility, and ethics of communication); (2) cognitive skills (encompassing critical thinking, problem-solving skills, innovative thinking, intellectual load management skills, learning skills, information skills, and time management skills); and (3) personal attributes and emotional intelligence (covering emotional intelligence, integrity, optimism and positive thinking, flexibility, creativity, motivation, and empathy).

The World Health Organization (WHO) advocates for a range of life skills encompassing communication skills, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, decision-making, critical thinking skills, creative thinking skills, and metacognition. Additionally, it emphasizes the significance of learners managing their emotions, including dealing with success, failure, depression, loneliness, rejection, anger, anxiety, stress, and conflict within social relationships. Enhancing self-awareness in handling life changes is crucial for individuals to effectively navigate these emotional challenges (Greco et al., 2011).

Aziz and Zaidoune (2022) define soft skills as career or job traits necessary for employability. In similar vein, Emoutanna and Motti (2022) use the term "employability skills" interchangeably with soft skills, referring to them as essential abilities not only for obtaining a job but also for advancing within a company. Chadil et al. (2022) similarly define soft skills as personal traits or qualities that individuals possess, encompassing attitudes, habits, and interpersonal interactions. These skills are instrumental in enhancing employability and opening doors to various opportunities beyond the scope of one's work.

2.3. Soft skills vs hard skills

According to Krauss and Boss (2013), skills are typically categorized into 'hard' skills and 'soft' skills. Hard skills primarily pertain to technical abilities, focusing on the human capacity to perform tasks and acquire new knowledge. However, defining soft or generic skills has been more challenging. Likewise, Elouaali et al. (2024) contend that in today's labor market, hard skills alone are insufficient for employment; candidates must also possess soft skills. While hard skills are predominantly cognitive and necessitate acquired knowledge (Weber et al., 2009), they primarily encompass conceptual and theory-based knowledge domains (North & Worth, 2000; Windels et al., 2013). Additionally, hard skills typically form the educational focal point, requiring explicit instruction (Dickinson, 2020).

Furthermore, Aziz and Zaidoune (2022) emphasize the importance of integrating and cultivating specific soft skills within universities. They highlight the necessity to incorporate a specific set of attributes such as the ability to cooperate, communicate, and solve problems. In addition to that, they note that unlike academic or disciplinary knowledge, which is subject-based and formally assessed, soft skills encompass a range of competencies that are independent of, though often developed by, formal curricula and are rarely explicitly assessed. This underscores the significance of integrating soft skills into the curriculum and the imperative of teaching and adopting them alongside hard skills.

Individuals who are well-equipped with both hard and soft skills are more likely to thrive and achieve professional success (Rao, 2014). Traditionally, management and leadership focus were predominantly on technical skills, known as hard skills, which are crucial for effective organizational performance. However, in contemporary times, there is an increasing need for leaders who also possess critical soft skills (Aldulaimi, 2018). While technical skills remain vital, soft skills are deemed equally important, if not more, in terms of individual employability and performance.

2.4. The workplace expectations

Choudary and Ponnuru (2015) identify several reasons for conflicts among employees within organizations, including confusion between interests and needs and miscommunication on multiple levels. Despite the significant focus on technical training of hard skills by academic institutions, these skills remain insufficient. Consequently, there exists a gap between instructors' task evaluation demands and the requirements of the job market (Nair & Fahimirad, 2019). Leckey and McGuigan (1997) express concern over the perceived gap between the generic skills fostered by higher education and those demanded by the labor market.

Employers seek versatile individuals who can drive organizations forward positively to compete successfully in the marketplace (Pai & Mayya, 2022). In this regard, Nicola et al. (2018) suggest that enterprises not only seek individuals with knowledge but also value their contribution to the organization's culture and their perspective. In fact, soft skills are prioritized during the hiring process and throughout an employee's tenure with the company, as they can significantly impact the company's outcomes and productivity (Caggiano et al., 2020). Research indicates that employers often prioritize problem-solving and collaboration abilities over university degrees (Noah & Aziz, 2020). In addition, Hasshas and Tamiri (2022) highlight empathy, correlation, sharing, communication, critical thinking, and negotiation as pivotal skills for individual development and success in the Moroccan labor market. They further identify courage, resilience, tranquility, disposition for self-change, engagement with the

world, and curiosity and willingness to communicate as the most crucial soft skills or non-academic skills.

The integration of soft skills into higher education curricula in Morocco is deemed imperative, as it enhances students' prospects of being accepted by recruiters (Elouaali et al., 2024). In this regard, Elmoutana and Motti (2022) stress the significant need to incorporate soft skills development into university curricula to prepare new candidates for their professional careers. They emphasize that candidates proficient in both soft and hard skills are more likely to be employable than those who excel in just one area. Therefore, higher education institutions should prioritize the enhancement of learners' soft skills, ensuring that university education encompasses both hard and soft skills.

2.5. Students' levels of soft skills

Alwadai (2023) asserts that according to several studies, today's university graduates often aspire to enter the workforce but lack the necessary qualifications to meet the demands of contemporary employers. While their subject-specific knowledge and skills may be robust, they often lack the transferable knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for success in the workplace (Beckingham, 2023; Rahate Ellah and Azmi, 2023). This deficiency in soft skills creates a significant skill gap between the capabilities of students and graduates and the requirements of employers (Beckingham, 2023).

Soft skills should ideally be nurtured in individuals from early childhood, beginning in their homes and continuing throughout primary schooling. However, at the university level, students become increasingly aware of the importance of soft skills about their future employment prospects. This awareness should serve as a self-motivator for students to enhance their soft skills using the university curriculum (Andrews and Higson, 2008). Furthermore, higher education plays a vital role in preparing students for the workforce. Along with academic proficiency, which includes effective communication, adaptability, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity (Diawati et al., 2023; Manafe et al., 2023).

2.6. Integration of soft skills needed in the workplace in Higher education

Keow Ngang (2011) distinguishes between training and education, highlighting that training is typically job-specific or tailored to specific classes of jobs. It aims to equip individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge to operate machinery safely, enhance efficiency, and adhere to regulations. Moreover, training imparts accepted practices and procedures, providing individuals with the skills required to execute particular tasks effectively. On the other hand, education is characterized as a transformative process that empowers individuals with knowledge, skills, perspectives, and values, enabling them to actively participate in and

contribute to their well-being, as well as that of their community and nation. In this sense, Choudary and Ponnuru (2015) define training as a planned process aimed at altering attitudes, knowledge, or skill behavior through learning experiences to achieve effective performance across various activities. Similarly, Keow Ngang (2011) stated that the development of soft skills through formal teaching and learning activities takes three models; stand-alone subject, embedded, and combination of the two models.

Researchers have suggested some techniques and methods teach soft skills, namely cooperative learning (Zhang, 2012, Tagg, 2003, Tlhoaele et al. 2016), workplace simulations practices (Talavera et al. 2007), task-based learning (Stanley, 2003; Willis, 1996), debate and public speaking (Aclan et al., 2016), and the use of tech like social media (Ismail, 2019; Hamat et al., 2012). Papert and Harel (1991) posit that innovative methods adopt a constructionist stance. Similarly, Choudary and Ponnuru (2015) suggest that soft skills can be taught through various methods, including Behavioral Modeling, trainer-led lectures, Business Management Games, Role-Playing, Linguistic Mind Skills, Presentation Skills, and Conflict Management.

- Behavioral Modeling allows trainees to practice behaviors through role plays, games, and other learning techniques, commonly used in interview and sales training.
- Trainer Led Lectures cover communication, negotiation, influencing, and decision-making, with role-playing helping trainees practice new techniques.
- Business Management Games simulate real-life problems faced in organizations.
- Role-Playing enables learners to act out workplace issues, either in pairs or in front of a group.
- Linguistic Mind Skills are important for managers who engage in verbal and written communication, including emails, reports, meetings, and presentations.
- Presentation Skills involve not only delivering information but also self-exploration.
- Conflict Management addresses differences in thinking, perspectives, experiences, attitudes, expectations, and emotional intelligence among team members, which may lead to conflicts in organizations.

Alwadai (2023) stated that it is recommended that students be provided the freedom to move around the room, or the opportunity to work with a fidget device, as kinesthetic activities stimulate creativity and work production. Likewise, Meyer (2015) asserts kinesthetic activities are crucial, alongside recognizing student interests in the acquisition of life skills.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The research method encompasses the presentation of the research design, the instrument utilized for data collection, the data analysis methodology employed, and the participants involved in the study.

3.1.Research design

The objective of this paper is to examine the proficiency level of soft skills among students and assess the degree to which Moroccan universities integrate these skills to meet workplace demands. The research utilized a quantitative methodology, focusing on a case study of students studying management techniques. To gather data, a non-probability sampling method known as convenience sampling was utilized, primarily due to time limitations and the availability of the selected group of students to the researcher.

3.2.Instrument

To explore potential disparities between student learning and workplace demands, the researcher devised a survey informed by relevant literature. The survey comprised closed-ended questions in a dichotomous format, allowing for "yes" or "no" responses regarding participants' experiences. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section focused on students' levels of soft skills, aiming to assess specific competencies such as communication skills, teamwork, responsibility, critical thinking, problem-solving, innovation, management skills, emotional intelligence, flexibility, open-mindedness, and integrity. The second section was devoted to understanding how these soft skills are developed at the university, specifically examining the university's role in shaping and developing these skills through activities such as role-play, discussions, presentations, conflict management, writing emails and reports, and reflection on issues.

After briefing participants on the topic and obtaining their consent, the survey was administered on-site. The gathered data was subsequently entered into an Excel spreadsheet, coded as 1=yes and 2=no, and then imported into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 for analysis. The data was decoded and analyzed using appropriate statistical methods.

3.3.Participants

The study focused on a cohort of 412 first and second year, semester two and four students enrolled in the management technique program at the School of Technology. These students hailed from diverse geographical locations and possessed varied backgrounds. Their ages ranged from 19 to 24 years old. Of the participants, 122 were male, while 290 were female.

4. RESULTS
4.1.Students level of soft skills

Table 1. Communication skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	47	11.4	11.4	11.4
	no	365	88.6	88.6	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

The table provided illustrates the proficiency levels of participants in communication. Merely 11.4% exhibit competence in communication, with the remaining 88.6% lacking such skills.

Table 2. Teamwork

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	408	99.0	99.0	99.0
	no	4	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 depicts the participants'aptitude for group work. A substantial majority, totaling 99%, asserted their capability to collaborate in groups, whereas 1% admitted their incapacity to do so.

Table 3. Responsibility

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	338	82.0	82.0	82.0
	no	74	18.0	18.0	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

As per the assessment of students' capacity to assume responsibility, Table 3 indicates that 82% affirmed their capability (yes), indicating their readiness to take on responsibilities. Conversely, a mere 18% selected no, signifying their inability to do so.

Table 4. Critical thinking skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	346	84.0	84.0	84.0
	no	66	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

In Table 4, the participants' aptitude for critical thinking is depicted. A majority, comprising 84% of the total, asserted possessing critical thinking skills. Conversely, 16% expressed skepticism about their capacity for critical thinking.

Table 5. Problem solving

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	313	76.0	76.0	76.0
	no	99	24.0	24.0	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

Regarding the proficiency of the participants in problem-solving, Table 5 reveals that a significant majority, totaling 76%, have problem-solving abilities. Conversely, a mere 24% of the participants admitted to lacking these skills.

Table 6. Innovation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	373	90.5	90.5	90.5
	No	39	9.5	9.5	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 delineates the participants' innovation level. A notable 90.5% self-identify as innovative, whereas the remaining 9.5% do not perceive themselves as such.

Table 7. Management skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	365	88.6	88.6	88.6
	no	47	11.4	11.4	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

Regarding the participants' proficiency in management skills, Table 7 illustrates that 88.6% demonstrate competence in managerial abilities, whereas 11.4% do not possess such skills.

Table 8. Emotional intelligence

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	307	74.5	74.5	74.5
	no	105	25.5	25.5	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

When it comes to the participants' emotional intelligence, Table 8 indicates that 74.5% exhibit this skill, while a minority of 25.5% do not possess it.

Table 9. Flexibility

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	373	90.5	90.5	90.5
	no	39	9.5	9.5	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

Regarding the flexibility level of the participants, Table 9 reflects that 90.5% perceive themselves as flexible, while 9.5% do not consider themselves as such.

Table 10. Open mindedness

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	374	90.8	90.8	90.8
	no	38	9.2	9.2	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

Table 10 portrays the participants' degree of open-mindedness. A significant 90.8% asserted that they possess open-minded traits, whereas a minority of 9.2% claimed the contrary.

Table 11. Integrity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	308	74.8	74.8	74.8
	no	104	25.2	25.2	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

Regarding their integrity level, 74.8% of the participants demonstrate integrity, while 25.2% lack this ability.

4.2.How learners acquire their soft skills at the university

Table 12. Role play

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	42	10.2	10.2	10.2
	no	370	89.8	89.8	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

As per Table 12, merely 10.2% of the participants acquire soft skills through role-playing in class, while the majority, constituting 89.8%, do not engage in role-playing as a method to learn the content.

Table 13. Discussions of topics

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	296	71.8	71.8	71.8
	no	116	28.2	28.2	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

Regarding discussions of topics, 71.8% of participants selected "yes" as a favorable option for engaging in classroom discussions, while 28% opted for "no."

Table 14. Presentations

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	387	93.9	93.9	93.9
	no	25	6.1	6.1	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

Based on the results, 93.9% of participants learn through delivering presentations, whereas 6.1% assert that they do not learn through this method.

Table 15. Conflict management

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	288	69.9	69.9	69.9
	no	124	30.1	30.1	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

According to the data presented in Table 15, 69.9% of individuals learn by managing conflicts, whereas 30.1% do not find this method conducive to learning.

Table 16. Writing emails, reports, and communications

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	370	89.8	89.8	89.8
	no	42	10.2	10.2	100.0
	Total	412	100.0	100.0	

Table 16 presents the participants' preferences for learning through writing emails, reports, and communications. A majority, totaling 89.8%, indicated "yes" as their preferred method of learning, while 10.2% expressed a contrary opinion.

Table 17. Reflection on issues

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	334	81.1	81.1	81.1
	no	78	18.9	18.9	100.0

Total	412	100.0	100.0

Table 17 outlines that 81.1% of participants learn by reflecting on issues, while 18.9% do not utilize this method for learning.

4.3. Hypotheses testing

Using One sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test to test the research hypotheses. Results are demonstrated below:

Table 18. University students' level of soft skills hypothesis testing

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The median of stslevel equals 2	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

From Table 18, it can be inferred that the null hypothesis, which posited that students' level in soft skills is weak, is rejected. Instead, the test result suggests that students' level in soft skills is relatively strong.

Table 19. university curriculum teaching of soft skills hypothesis testing

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The median of howstslearn equals 2.	One-Sample Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	.034	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is .05.

According to Table 19, it is evident that the hypothesis claiming that the university curriculum fails to incorporate soft skills is refuted, supporting the alternative hypothesis which asserts that soft skills are indeed integrated into the university curriculum.

5. DISCUSSION
5.1. Students level of soft skills

After reviewing the literature, it became evident that several factors contribute to the rise in both limited job opportunities and overburdened educational institutions, subsequently resulting in heightened unemployment rates and stagnant academic environments. One notable aspect is the critique from recent graduates who attribute their struggles to universities' failure in imparting essential job market skills. Likewise, employers express dissatisfaction with fresh graduates' deficient soft skills. This study aims to explore management technique students' proficiency in soft skills, as they are anticipated to graduate equipped with such competencies. Specifically, it seeks to ascertain whether there exists a disparity between students' level of

soft skills and the expectations of recruiters in professional settings. Aligned with the current study, Amina and Zohri (2019) conducted research to explore whether Moroccan universities emphasize the cultivation of students' entrepreneurial mindset and skills for entrepreneurship. The findings elucidated that students predominantly acquire knowledge of entrepreneurship through extracurricular activities organized by external entities, professional organizations, and student associations.

The findings generally yielded positive results, indicating that students possess a high level of soft skills and employ constructive learning methods at the university to foster their development, with the exception of communication skills. A majority (88.6%) acknowledged a deficiency in communication skills, while a minority (11.4%) reported confidence in their communication abilities. This outcome is contrary to that of Benjelloun (2021) who found that the implementation of the Think-Pair-Share strategy notably facilitated students of predominantly average and weaker proficiency levels in expressing their opinions on various familiar topics with increased ease, confidence, and fluency. This approach also resulted in the utilization of more suitable vocabulary and a more organized structure of ideas in their communication. This contradicts the assertions made by several scholars (Alwadai, 2023; Beckingham, 2023; Rahate Ellah & Azmi, 2023), who contend that today's university graduates often seek to enter the workforce yet frequently lack the necessary qualifications to meet the demands of contemporary employers. In this vein, students can enhance their communicative language skills through participatory activities such as group work, which they excel in. Engaging in class discussions facilitates the cultivation of effective communication skills and fosters group cohesion and improvement. By showcasing their proficiency in group work, participants indirectly demonstrated their communication prowess, time management abilities, and a strong sense of accountability and responsibility, evidenced by their adherence to project deadlines. Moreover, they exhibited a capacity for innovative problem-solving, displaying a tendency to approach challenges with creativity and resilience rather than fixating on negative outcomes. Problem-solving experiences teach students to remain composed and collaborate harmoniously to devise solutions. In group settings, active listening is essential, encouraging an open-minded approach that considers diverse perspectives, enriching their problem-solving capabilities with insights they may not have previously contemplated. Likewise, in a study conducted by Chadil et al. (2022), it was revealed that students at Ben M'sick Faculty of Science prioritize training, teamwork, and problem-solving as the most effective teaching methodologies for acquiring soft skills.

Moreover, the participants exhibited strong critical thinking skills, empowering them to make informed decisions rather than simply conforming to group consensus. Their ability to think critically involves thorough examination of all facets of an issue, drawing from past experiences to chart new and effective pathways forward. Conversely, a study conducted by

Msaddek (2020) aimed to assess the degree of (meta)cognitive awareness among EFL learners regarding the utilization of text-based strategies. The comprehensive results of the study clearly indicate a significant inadequacy in the awareness and application of (meta)cognitive strategies among Moroccan EFL learners. Furthermore, the participants of this study demonstrated high levels of integrity and a penchant for innovation and creativity. While collaborative work may pose challenges, it presents an invaluable opportunity to unearth innovative ideas, exchange diverse perspectives and experiences, and refine their own skill sets. By approaching each group project as a learning opportunity, they cultivate productivity within their team dynamics and nurture a propensity for exploring novel approaches, thereby enhancing their contributions as team members, managers, and leaders. Building upon the current findings, Slimani and Abakouy (2023) conducted an assessment to gauge the impact and engagement of Abdelmalek Essaâdi University in enhancing regional competitiveness through the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals. Participants recognized the university's effectiveness in promoting innovation and nurturing entrepreneurship, with 52% rating its performance as moderately effective.

5.2. How learners acquire their soft skills at the University

Regarding the methods employed to instruct students in the course content, a variety of communicative approaches were utilized, including role-playing, topic discussions, written communication tasks such as composing emails, reports, and presentations, conflict management exercises, and reflective activities. Role-playing exercises, particularly beneficial for management technique students, enabled them to assume various roles such as interviewer, interviewee, manager, and employee, facilitating the development of active listening skills, critical thinking abilities, and emotional intelligence. Participants also reported significant learning through topic discussions, which fostered critical thinking, open-mindedness, and innovative thinking. Additionally, tasks involving written communication, such as drafting emails and reports, held particular importance for future managers who will be required to produce various types of written documents, including progress reports, daily work reports, incident reports, and business emails, to convey important information, provide feedback, delegate tasks, and motivate team members. In a study conducted by Benattabou (2020), the argument was made for the inclusion of an intercultural communication course within the curriculum tailored for Moroccan learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This integration would involve employing various methods such as critical incident exercises, role-plays, and the utilization of audiovisual media tools. The teacher's role would evolve into that of a cultural interpreter, aiding students in understanding the cultural nuances of the topics discussed and raising awareness about the potential challenges inherent in cross-cultural encounters.

Additionally, a majority of the participants highlighted learning through delivering presentations, which holds particular significance as managers, given their responsibility to disseminate information effectively to both team members and clients. In a parallel study conducted by Abouabdelkader et al. (2023), which sought to explore the impact of technology-assisted presentation skills on the English proficiency of fourth-year Moroccan Engineering students with at least a B2 level of English proficiency, notable findings emerged. The research revealed significant improvements among students in their capacity to define, illustrate, categorize, describe, compare, and analyze engineering concepts and products through presentations. Moreover, the results indicated that participants benefitted from learning through conflict management and reflective practices. As future managers, adept conflict resolution is an essential component of their role. They must grasp the intricacies of the conflict, engage with it directly, discern its underlying causes, and subsequently devise effective solutions. Furthermore, reflection serves as a vital tool for managerial growth, allowing them to remain proactive by stepping back, evaluating experiences, and implementing necessary adjustments. In a related study by El Mortaji (2018), which aimed to assess the impact of combining videotaping and self-reflection assessment essays on the development of college students' public speaking skills, noteworthy results emerged. The findings indicated that students perceived a significant enhancement in their public speaking abilities through this approach. All students without exception (100%) reported that videotaping played a crucial role in their skill development as they progressed from one speech to another. Improvement was evident across various aspects including content, non-verbal communication, and verbal communication, as demonstrated by students' reflective essays. Indeed, training students through structured learning experiences can significantly influence their attitudes, knowledge, and skill behaviors, ultimately leading to more effective performance across various activities (Choudary & Ponnuru, 2015).

6. CONCLUSION

This paper aims to evaluate the gaps between the skill sets preferred by employers and those acquired by students. The results indicate that the content and methodologies employed in university education align well with workplace demands and recruiter expectations. Specifically, participants enrolled in management technique programs showcased a high proficiency in soft skills, reflecting the effectiveness of university teaching methods in enhancing these skills. Overall, the study suggests that the university curriculum and instructional approaches contribute significantly to the development of students' soft skills, bridging the divide between educational outcomes and employer requirements. The study suggests that outcomes could vary across other academic departments, indicating a necessity for additional research in this area.

The study presents several implications for both university teachers and students. University teachers should enhance students' learning of foreign languages, particularly English, especially for those studying English for Specific Purposes (ESP). These students often perceive English as a supplementary course rather than a primary one, as they have other specializations. Consequently, it is essential to integrate more effective language learning strategies into their curriculum. For students, it is crucial to recognize their role as autonomous learners. They should not solely depend on the university curriculum or classroom lectures to develop their skills. Instead, they should actively seek various implicit methods to enhance and shape their competencies. This can be achieved by engaging in diverse experiences that provide opportunities to practice problem-solving and other relevant skills.

Future researchers are encouraged to explore this issue in greater depth. Employing qualitative methods such as interviews and observations can provide richer insights into students' experiences, particularly regarding how the university environment influences their persistence and efforts in developing both soft and hard skills. This approach can yield a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by students in their skill development journey.

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