



EXPLORING MOROCCAN UNDERGRADUATES' VIEWS ON DEVELOPING SOFT SKILLS IN EFL CLASSES: A CASE STUDY

Soukaina AZIZ

FLSH Ben M'sik (Hassan II University of Casablanca), Morocco

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0000-0000-0000>

soukaynaaziz25@gmail.com

Meriem HARRIZI

FLSH Ben M'sik (Hassan II University of Casablanca, Morocco)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6044-7341>

m.harrizi@flbenmsik.ma

Ayoub LOUTFI

FLSH Ben M'sik (Hassan II University of Casablanca, Morocco)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7830-3173>

a.loutfi@flbenmsik.ma

Said ZAIDOUNE

FLSH Ben M'sik (Hassan II University of Casablanca, Morocco)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8921-5255>

zaidoune44@yahoo.co.uk

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Abstract

In 2022, the new minister of Moroccan Higher Education and Scientific Research amended the LMD (License, Master, Doctorate) system to ensure the implementation of soft skills (Miraoui, 2022). As soft skills gain greater recognition in education reform, this study aimed to examine how EFL students at the Ben Msik faculty of Letters and Humanities perceive the role of these skills. The study involved conducting a focus group interview with 22 students from this faculty in the Casablanca-Settat region of Morocco to gather insights. Based on the students' responses, the five most significant soft skill development strategies to be incorporated into EFL classrooms were discussions and debates, voluntary work and community service, virtual platforms and exchange, making presentations, and projects.

Keywords: Moroccan higher education, soft skills, EFL students, soft skill development strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Investing in education is crucial for a developing nation like Morocco to support its economic development goals. To generate a pool of competent and flexible labor in a competitive global market, it is important to prioritize soft skills training. Soft skills, such as effective communication, collaboration, and sharing of ideas, are highly valued by employers (Hawkins & Winter, 2006). Research also shows that soft skills are just as important as hard skills for landing entry-level jobs and predicting success, salaries, graduation rates, and home ownership (Pritchard, 2013).

To ensure that students are prepared for a range of future vocations, Moroccan universities need to incorporate soft skills training into every course design. The Ministry of Moroccan Higher Education has undertaken a number of reforms, including the Bachelor system (2019), to improve the quality of university education in the country (Ministère de l'éducation Nationale, de l'enseignement Supérieur de la Formation des Cadres et de la Recherche Scientifique, 2019). However, the new Moroccan minister



of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Abdellatif Miraoui, recently postponed the introduction of the Bachelor system and made significant changes to the LMD (license, Master, and Doctorate) system to include practicum, coaching, and service learning (Miraoui, 2022).

Given these changes, it is important to examine students' perceptions of soft skills in the context of higher education in Morocco, specifically EFL education. This qualitative study aims to answer several questions, including the most important soft skills to include in EFL classes as perceived by undergraduates, strategies for developing these skills, who is responsible for soft skill development, and the best integration model of soft skills in EFL education. The study will focus on EFL undergraduates in the Ben Msik faculty of Letters and Humanities at Moroccan universities.

1. What soft skills do undergraduate students perceive as the most important to be incorporated into EFL classes? What are the strategies to develop soft skills as perceived by undergraduates?
2. Who do undergraduates perceive as being responsible for the development of soft skills?
3. How can soft skills be effectively integrated into EFL education?

Literature Review

Soft Skills and Hard Skills

Soft skills play a critical role in enhancing the application of hard and technical abilities in the workplace. Achieving a balance between soft and hard skills enables individuals to effectively address challenges and seize opportunities in pursuit of individual, team, or organization-focused objectives (Truong, 2016). According to James and James (2004), soft skills complement and strengthen hard talents, and possessing both is essential for creating purposeful and understandable workplace situations. Therefore, it is crucial to distinguish between soft skills and hard abilities.

Kantrowitz (2005) defines soft skills as non-technical, trans-situational skills that include problem-solving, communication, personal attributes, work ethic, and interpersonal and collaborative abilities. Soft skills are executed in the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains and enhance the use of technical skills and knowledge in the workplace. Similarly, Newell (2002) categorizes soft skills as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, which are all manifestations of emotional intelligence. In contrast, hard talents are characterized by logical reasoning, rigorous analytic thinking, and strategic long-term vision, which are all aspects of cognitive intelligence.

Weber et al. (2009) further explain that soft skills are interpersonal, human, people, or behavioral skills that are necessary to use technical knowledge and abilities in the workplace. In contrast, hard skills pertain to the technical facets of performing a task and require information acquisition. They are typically cognitive in nature.

Soft skills are essential non-technical abilities that encompass interpersonal and intrapersonal skills necessary for successful performance in a variety of settings, according to Hurell et al. (2012). In contrast, hard skills, defined by Hutchinson and Brefka (1997), refer to job objectives, academic background, and work experience. Robles (2012) elaborates on this distinction, defining soft skills as interpersonal qualities involving character traits, attitudes, and behaviors, which are distinct from technical ability or job-seeking knowledge.

On the other hand, Klaus et al. (2007) define hard skills as the factual and technical knowledge required to perform a specific job. While hard skills are necessary for the effective use of technical abilities and knowledge, Klaus et al. (2007) also emphasize the importance of soft skills as non-technical traits and behaviors that facilitate a more effective application of technical abilities and knowledge. In fact, they believe that soft skills complement hard skills and are equally important for career success. As Klaus et al. (2007) note, "you can have all the technical expertise in the world, but if you can't sell your ideas, get along with others, or submit your work on time, you'll get nowhere."



Hard skills are skills that can be acquired through training and experience, while soft skills are non-technical and can be challenging to develop. The acquisition of soft skills can lead to personal growth and development. Unlike hard skills, soft skills are experience-based rather than rule-based, with a greater focus on people rather than technical aspects. They are also more versatile and transferable, making them applicable in a wide range of settings (Truong, 2016).

Therefore, possessing both soft and hard skills is crucial for producing competent and job-ready professionals. Even if a person has the necessary hard talents, lacking the soft ones can hinder their ability to navigate the workplace and achieve significant progress.

Developing Soft Skills

Tevdovska (2015) explores strategies to integrate soft skills into foreign language learning and teaching, particularly in English language courses. These strategies include task-based and problem-solving activities, which encourage students to use the target language to resolve a given problem. Group activities such as talks and debates foster communication and interpersonal skills, while ethical concerns pertaining to professional life are discussed to develop decision-making skills. Other activities include presenting oral and poster displays, simulations of meetings and interviews, and feedback sessions with colleagues, subordinates, and superiors to develop effective communication skills in the workplace. Although these approaches are not exhaustive, they are effective and engaging, making them ideal for introducing undergraduate students to soft skills training.

Andrievskikh and Lapina (2021) conducted a descriptive study and proposed recommendations for integrating the development of soft skills into university English language classes. One of the suggested methods for enhancing soft skills is by participating in debates. Debates provide students with the opportunity to practice communication, active listening, and presentation skills, as well as to collaborate effectively by using arguments to support their viewpoints. Through debates, students naturally engage in active collaboration, taking turns to express their ideas in depth. Additionally, students are equipped with collaborative skills by engaging in project work early on, receiving step-by-step instructions and useful recommendations to facilitate their progress.

Caeiro-Rodriguez et al. (2021) conducted a study on the promotion and instruction of soft skills in higher education institutions across five European countries. The study provides an overview of best practices, with a particular emphasis on technological solutions that facilitate the development of soft skills. One section of the questionnaire focused on students' perceptions of instructional strategies used to teach soft skills. The results showed that respondents in the fields of engineering and economics rated "problem-based learning" as the most effective educational strategy, followed by "thinking-based learning," "design thinking," and "competency-based learning." Conversely, cooperative learning, gamification, and the flipped classroom were ranked as the least effective strategies.

Moustadraf (2021) conducted a study in the Moroccan context to examine the value of soft skills from the perspective of engineering undergraduates. A total of 255 students from four universities in Morocco completed a questionnaire to provide data for the study. The results indicated that students acquired more soft skills through active teaching methods, in contrast to the traditional academic model. Furthermore, when asked to rate the most effective pedagogical methods for soft skills development, students identified group work, internships, problem-solving, role-playing, case studies, flipped classrooms, lectures, and project-based learning as the most important strategies.

In a study conducted by Azmi (2018), the impact of an English language environment supported by ICT on intercultural interactions and the development of soft skills among Moroccan students was analysed. The study evaluated the influence of ICT-enhanced teaching materials and content on intercultural exchanges and personal development through focus group interviews with the participating students. The results indicate that the majority of respondents agreed that the use of ICT provides a platform for discussing global concerns and encourages the dissemination and exchange of global ideals in the EFL classroom. Additionally, students believe that the integration of online web content and apps such as videos, podcasts, blogs, and photographs enhances the effectiveness of class delivery.



METHOD

Research Design and Approach

In light of the study's objectives, a qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate methodology. The distinction between qualitative and quantitative research often hinges on the use of words (qualitative) versus figures (quantitative) or closed-ended questions (quantitative hypotheses) versus open-ended questions (qualitative interview questions) (Creswell, 2014). By employing a qualitative approach, this study seeks to elucidate the most crucial soft skills in EFL classrooms and identify effective strategies for their development.

Among the available qualitative designs, a case study approach was selected for this study. The aim was to gain a comprehensive understanding, discern meaning, and grasp the perspectives of EFL students. A descriptive case study was specifically chosen to provide a detailed overview of the soft skill development strategies perceived by the students. To narrow the scope, participants were selected solely from the Ben Msik Faculty of Letters and Humanities English Department, located in Casablanca. This site was chosen by the researcher for accessibility and participant selection purposes after obtaining their consent. This enabled the researcher to provide an in-depth description of the situation and perceptions of the EFL students.

Participants

The study involved the participation of 22 Moroccan EFL students from the Ben Msik Faculty of Letters and Humanities located in the Casablanca-Settat region. Given the small scale and qualitative nature of the study, purposive sampling was employed to select participants. In this type of sampling, which is commonly utilized in qualitative research, researchers manually choose instances to be included in the sample based on their perception of their typicality or possession of specific qualities being sought. This allows researchers to construct a sample that meets their specific requirements (Cohen et al., 2018)

The case study involved a group of 22 EFL students from the English department of the Ben Msik faculty of Letters and Humanities. As per Creswell's (2014) recommendations for qualitative research, the number of participants was deliberately kept low to facilitate data collection and analysis, and to avoid superficial results. To be eligible for the study, participants had to fulfill two criteria: (a) they had to be students at the Ben Msik faculty of Letters and Humanities, where the study was being conducted, and (b) they had to be enrolled in the English department. Initially, a list of EFL S1, S3, and S5 students was obtained, and their respective timetables were acquired from their teacher. Following this, the researcher visited each group and invited students to participate in the study. Seven S1 students, seven S3 students, and eight S5 students expressed interest in participating. To ensure that the participants possessed relevant knowledge and could offer useful insights, they had to meet specific criteria, namely:

- display an interest in soft skills debates in higher education
- demonstrate sociability and exhibit some soft skills
- have previous involvement in community service and projects

By fulfilling these criteria, the participants were well-equipped to contribute meaningful perspectives to the study.

Data Collection Procedure

The objective of this study was to explore the perspectives of EFL students at the Ben Msik faculty of Letters and Humanities in Casablanca regarding the significance of soft skills in EFL classes and the most effective soft skill development strategies. The study utilized focus group interviews as a data collection method. Focus groups are group interviews where participants discuss a specific topic, and the emphasis is on the group's interactions, producing a communal perspective rather than an individual one. This method allows participants to communicate with one another instead of solely with the interviewer, allowing for the emergence of a variety of perspectives. Additionally, the participants' agenda takes precedence over that of the researcher (Cohen et al., 2018). Due to the nature of the study, it was not feasible to observe the performance of soft skills or use surveys to identify the most important ones or suitable development strategies.



The researcher conducted the interviews in English, using open-ended questions to allow the participants to freely express their thoughts and perceptions. The interviewees were also given time to reflect on their answers. To ensure that the interviews were conducted appropriately, an interview protocol outline was utilized. The interviews, which lasted about an hour each, were conducted on-site at the Ben Msik faculty, as per the participants' preference, and scheduled in advance based on their availability. The researcher collected handwritten notes and audio recordings of the interviews, with the participants' prior consent obtained for the recordings. While the researcher did offer the option of using their native language if they could not fully express themselves in English, all participants opted to communicate in English throughout the interviews.

Data Analysis Procedure

Firstly, after each interview was completed, the collected data was transcribed. This process was initiated the day after the interview, or at most within three days of its completion. Each recorded and transcribed interview was appropriately labeled to facilitate computer filing. As recommended by Creswell (2014), duplicate copies of the transcribed interviews were preserved.

Secondly, a summary of each interview was composed after reviewing the transcribed information. The summary was then sent to participants over WhatsApp to confirm the accuracy of the material and provide any further details or revisions to their initial comments. This approach was in accordance with Creswell's member checking approach (2014) to ensure the accuracy of the data. All participants confirmed the accuracy of the transcribed interviews, with one student requesting that additional information be added to their response. The response was adjusted accordingly based on their recommendation.

To begin the analysis, the data needed to be coded. This process involved segmenting and categorizing the various texts based on topics or themes. To expedite this process, computer-assisted coding software QDA Miner Lite was utilized. The researcher studied all the different codes and groups and reduced them to between 25 and 30 codes, as recommended by Creswell (2014). The coding process entailed dividing sentences into categories and assigning a term to each category.

To achieve the objective of conveying the findings in a systematic manner and demonstrating in-depth knowledge of the study's issue, it was necessary to create codes that would generate themes. According to Creswell (2014), codes should be condensed to five to seven themes, as information emerges from themes to address the research objectives.

Strategies for Validating Findings

In this study, three tactics were employed to enhance the validity and credibility of the qualitative research, namely member checking, external auditing, and reflexivity (Creswell, 2014). Member checking involved providing participants with the summary of the transcribed information from their interviews and requesting that they confirm its accuracy. External auditing was the second tactic used in the study. An external auditor with extensive research experience was asked to review the final report to identify any biased or subjective statements. To ensure confidentiality, the auditor signed a confidentiality agreement. As the researcher, reflexivity was also employed to be aware of possible biases and preconceptions regarding the study and its outcomes. In addition, the external auditor conducted the interview and recorded the researcher's responses to recognise and address any biases.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Emergent Themes from the Data Analysis

Important Soft Skills in EFL Classes

In the interviews, participants were asked to name the most crucial soft skills that need to be integrated in EFL classes. The frequency with which respondents identified these soft skills was utilised to rank them in descending order. The results are shown in Figure 1.

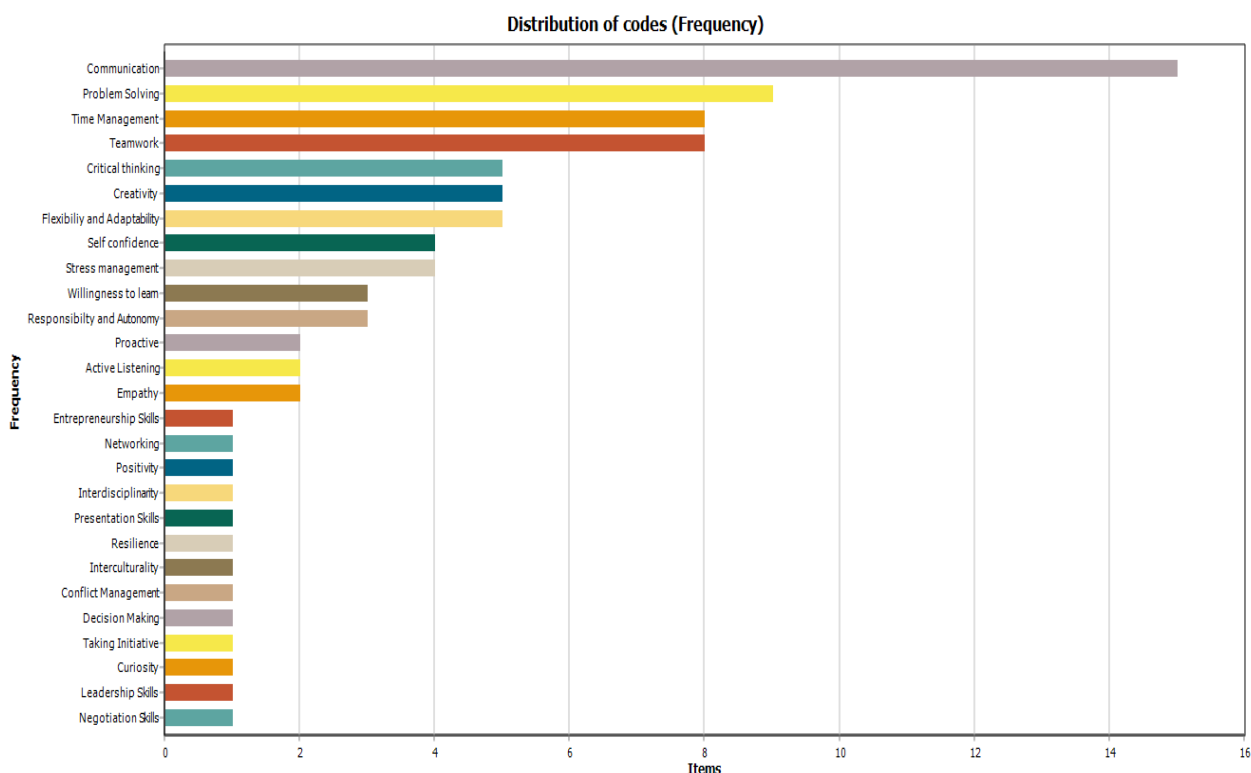


Figure 1. The Most Important Soft Skills in EFL classes

The majority of participants selected communication as the most essential soft skill to be incorporated in EFL classes explaining that it helps in communicating with classmates, teachers, becoming fluent in English and being employable.

P2: “Also, communication is important because we need to sell our skills, when we work in companies we need to communicate and we need have some meetings and even communicate with our customers and quickly understand them.”

Problem solving and time management were rated after communications as the most important soft skills in EFL classes explaining that students may face problems when learning English in the workplace or in their daily lives where they have to find suitable solutions. As for time management, respondents believed that time-management skills are essential for doing a lot of activities and tasks on time and even for one’s everyday life.

P2: “Also, solving problems is also an important soft skill. How to deal with obstacles in our professional and daily lives.” P1: “First of all I think that problem solving which means analytically and creatively solve problems when you face unexpected challenges because we learn a foreign language so we have to expect the unexpected.”

P5:” I think that the most important soft skill is to manage our time. Time management because when we manage our time we will read more we will have a lot of things and do many activities.” P4: “Also, there is time management because it helps us to take control of our day or to achieve or our most important or urgent tasks.” P7: “First of all, time management because if students learn how to organize their time they can be better students and improve their skills like inside the academia and they can be like better individuals like as a whole and it is a good base to start with.”

Teamwork and critical thinking were ranked after time management. Some respondents stated that the combined efforts of people in a team result in working toward a goal and a stronger sense of team spirit. Critical thinking was ranked as important because students face complex flow of ideas and need to



analyse situations in the workplace. Many participants chose creativity because they need think outside the box and to find ways instead of being spoon-fed in the classroom. Also, flexibility and adaptability are important because flexibility is necessary in order to adapt knowledge and skills to different contexts at the university or the workplace.

P1: “Teamwork is important if you are working in a team, you could do many things in a short time and also you will work with your friends to achieve many goals.”

P4: “There is critical thinking, the most important thing that we need this year to use to analyse and bring new ideas.”

P2: “Then, I would also go with creativity, you have to create ways, find ways that are more creative not just a paper pen way.”

P1: “. The last soft skill is adaptability as it does not always go as planned so we have to always expect the unexpected and deal with it.”

Self-confidence and stress management were ranked the same. Some participants opined that self – confidence is important for sharing knowledge in different contexts. Stress management is important as people face the challenge of working under stressful conditions nowadays which may hinder their efficiency and effectiveness.

P 2: “Also, self-confidence is important, because if we have lack of confidence, we can’t share our knowledge.”

P2: “Nowadays, working in a company and having a lot of tasks to do can be very stressful, so we have to learn how to manage our stress in order to be efficient rather than effective and work efficiently.”

Willingness to learn responsibility and autonomy were ranked the same. Three participants stressed on the fact that being motivated to learn is another important soft skill in EFL classes. Also, being an autonomous and responsible learner who is capable of self-development is of high importance in the EFL context. Proactive, active listening and empathy were ranked after autonomy and responsibility as important soft skills. The last soft skills were ranked the same. Entrepreneurship skills, networking and positivity, interdisciplinary, presentation skills, resilience, inter-culturality, conflict management, decision making, taking initiative, curiosity, leadership skills and negotiation skills each was chosen by a participant.

P5: “Also, we have desire as another important thing because when we have desire we can achieve anything we want. Also, to be competent because when have competence, we will have knowledge.”

P2: “Because we need some people who are responsible”

P2: “We need to have this kind of student who is proactive because we need to create a leader in the future”

P2: “when I think about sot skills when it comes to English learning as a foreign language, I would start with empathy as teachers you have to understand that your students are just beginners and you have to have empathy for them.”

P2: “Networking is also important because when we have a good network, we can find a lot of opportunities and currently big companies started to use artificial intelligence.”

P4: “Besides, positivity is also important because in our daily lives we are not all the time happy sometimes you find yourself under pressure and you have family problems and you find hope. So, positivity is very important to live.”

Strategies of Soft Skill Development

The study aimed to elicit ways for developing soft skills in EFL programs, specifically in soft skills education. Respondents offered several strategies for developing soft skills, with many highlighting the importance of conducting discussions and debates in EFL lessons. Additionally, participants noted the

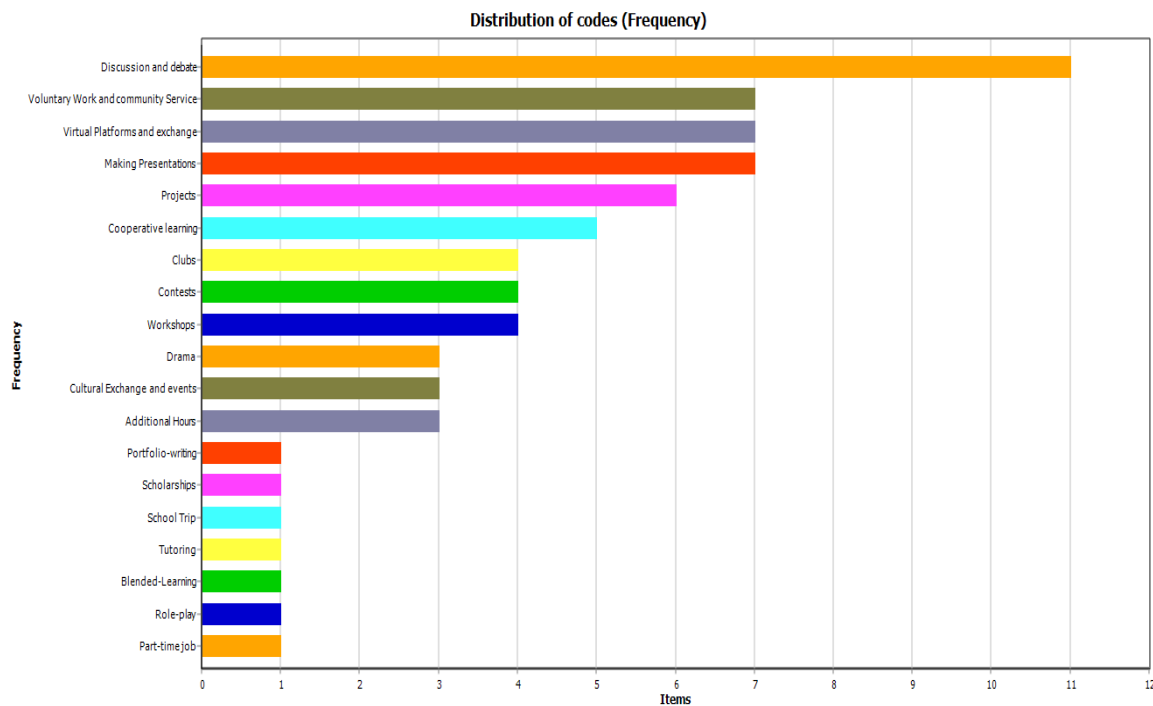


Figure 2. Strategies of Soft Skill Development

significance of voluntary work and community service, virtual platforms and exchange, making presentations, and engaging in projects, with some sharing personal anecdotes of how they developed various soft skills through these methods. Cooperative learning was also identified as an effective strategy, as it promotes learning from peers and working towards shared objectives.

Additionally, to foster the development of soft skills, respondents recommended that educational institutions establish organizations, conduct contests, and organize workshops to promote connections between students and teachers. They also suggested involving students in drama, cultural exchanges, and events. Respondents highlighted cultural exchanges, theatre involvement, and the organization of cultural events as other strategies for developing soft skills. Boosting students' self-confidence and enhancing their soft skills could also be achieved by providing additional hours or backup classes to address their weaknesses. Other useful strategies suggested by respondents included portfolio-writing, scholarships, school trips, tutoring, and blended learning. The results of these strategies are presented in Figure 2.

P1: “Teachers can create clubs like debate club in order to develop communication and self confidence and leadership skills”

P2: “Starting from volunteering in neighbourhood doing gardening and help keep the plants keep watering and keep the cleanliness of the street.”

P1: “Then the second one is pair work; I think we have different pairs every week. It would make them develop the sense of adapting with different peoples and it would also train them on how to solve problems with other people who are not the same as you.”

P1: “Secondly, for example if we use blended learning makes it clear in meeting the requirements of all students as there are students who prefer to follow classes virtually and others face to face. So blended learning can be at the disposal of both categories.”



Responsibility of Soft Skill Development

When asked about who should take responsibility for developing soft skills, students had varying opinions. The majority believed that students themselves are the primary resource for developing these skills, while many also acknowledged the role of university professors in fostering them. Others argued that soft skills are initially learned within the family unit, and then further developed through societal interactions and schooling, starting from primary education. While some students felt that teachers may not be qualified to teach these skills, they suggested that personal coaches or mentors could help students navigate challenging situations, build confidence, and overcome stage fright. See figure 3 for a breakdown of the results.

P2: “ I guess you are the only one who is responsible for soft skill development because you are the only one who knows what motivates you are you are the only one who knows yourself more than anyone else more than you parents or your friends or teachers. You know how much you can give and what motivates you. So I think no one should be involved to improve soft skills but you.”

P5: “In my opinion, I think that the educational system is responsible for developing soft skills because if students were taught in the first grade soft skills we wouldn’t face soft skills problems. So if we were taught in the first place to be brave in fact we would see many hidden genius people.”

P3: “teachers help you a lot. If you find difficult despite all of this, then you have to do something about.”

P4: “Even at university we can develop our soft skills also maybe hiring coaches would help too.”

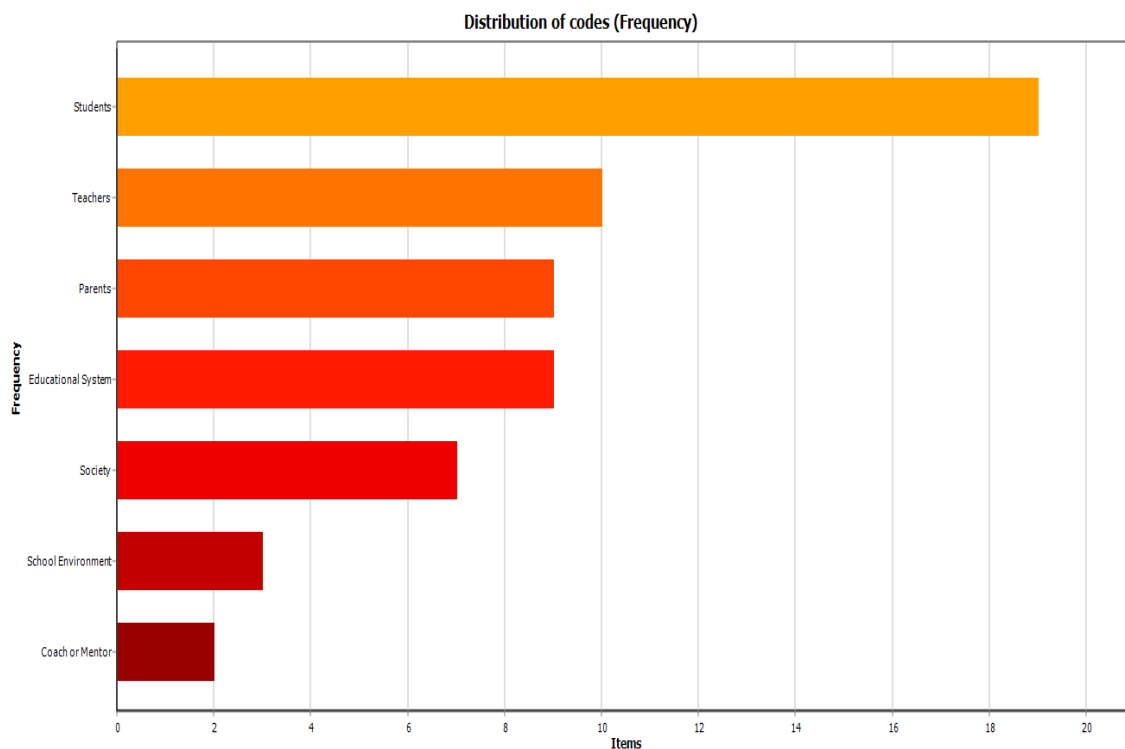


Figure 3. Responsibility of Soft Skill Development

Integration of Soft Skills in EFL Education

All the respondents in this study acknowledged the importance of incorporating soft skills into the EFL curriculum. However, when asked about the optimal strategy for achieving this, i.e., "extracurricular, stand-alone, or embedded models," respondents had varying opinions. Not surprisingly, the majority of students supported the usage of extracurricular activities to enhance soft skills since it allows them to



apply what they have learned as theory in the classroom. The second most preferred integration model, backed by the majority of respondents, was the Stand Alone model, which entails including soft skills into the formal curriculum similar to other formal courses. By teaching soft skills separately and in detail, students are assured that this model may ensure future improvement of these skills. Eight respondents chose the Embedded model, arguing that soft and hard skills should be taught concurrently, as teaching each separately would confuse students and divert their concentration from hard skills. The results of the study are presented in Figure 4.

P4: “and through the use of extracurricular activities. We need to practise soft skills here at the university and outside the university we learn how solve problems.”

P2: “I think soft skills should be taught as standalone classes because it is better to get deeper and to understand more those soft skills.”

P1: “I think it should be embedded in our classes because every class for example should include communication and not be taught as a separate subject.”

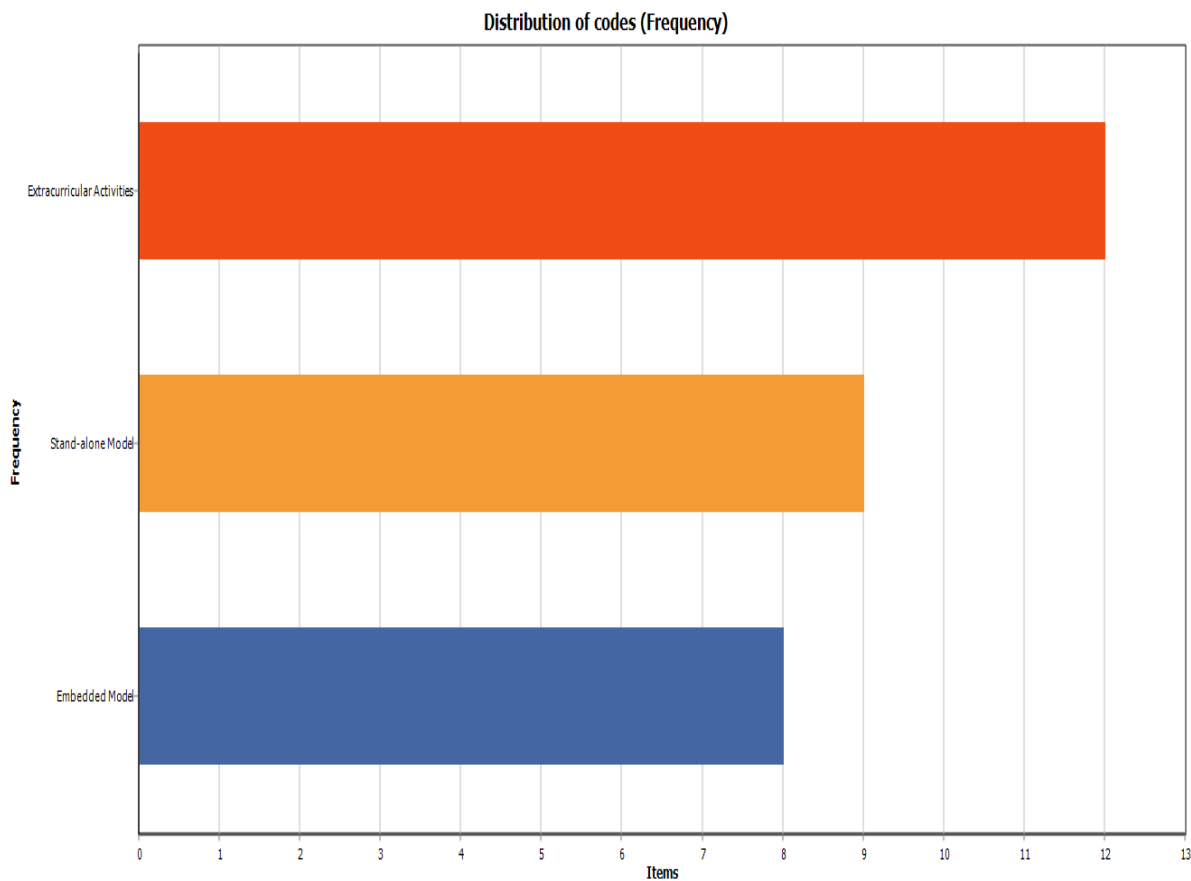


Figure 4. Integrating Soft Skills in EFL classes

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

The objective of this descriptive case study was to identify the key soft skills in EFL classes and the most effective strategies to develop them. The study also examined students' perceptions of those responsible for fostering soft skills, and focused on the most significant integration models of these skills in higher education EFL courses. Notably, previous research conducted in the Moroccan context did not specifically address the development of soft skills in EFL settings, making this study a valuable contribution to the field.



According to the overwhelming majority of respondents, communication was identified as the most critical soft skill in EFL classes. Proficient communication in English with classmates, instructors, and colleagues is essential for success in both academic and professional contexts. The second most vital soft skill was problem-solving, as students face a multitude of complex issues that require effective problem-solving skills. In addition, managing time and submitting assignments on schedule are common challenges that students encounter, making time management an essential soft skill in both the classroom and the workplace. Respondents also highlighted teamwork as a crucial soft skill, emphasizing the importance of collaborative work and negotiating solutions in order to complete tasks and meet deadlines.

In response to inquiries about the most effective strategies for developing soft skills in EFL classes, nearly all participants identified discussion and debate as the most essential approach. Through participating in class discussions and engaging in teacher-led debates on various topics, students are able to refine their communication skills. Additionally, voluntary work and community service offer students opportunities to mature, assist others, and further develop their soft skills in an ever-changing world. Given the ubiquity of technology in contemporary life, incorporating virtual platforms and engaging in online exchanges of ideas, cultures, and perspectives was another crucial method for enhancing soft skills, as highlighted by numerous respondents. Furthermore, a significant number of participants emphasized the importance of giving presentations, despite the potential anxiety associated with presenting in front of a large audience, as it can bolster self-confidence and foster the development of soft skills.

When asked about the responsibility for developing soft skills, students identified themselves as the primary responsible party, while teachers were ranked second due to their role in designing lesson plans and incorporating soft skills into the curriculum. Parents were seen as the third group responsible for fostering soft skills, as they are the first individuals with whom we interact and have an important role to play in this regard. With regard to the integration of soft skills, students were presented with three options: standalone, embedded, and extracurricular activities. The majority of respondents favored extracurricular activities as they provide opportunities for practical application of soft skills, complementing the theoretical instruction provided in the classroom.

The findings of this study are consistent with those of previous research, including Tevdovska's (2015) recommendations for incorporating soft skills into college courses, particularly in the EFL context. Tevdovska highlighted the value of group activities involving discussions and debates for fostering interpersonal and communication skills. Another effective approach is to provide opportunities for students to give oral and poster presentations on topics related to their professional interests, which can be evaluated to provide valuable feedback. Additionally, role plays and debates can be valuable tools for enhancing soft skills.

Andrievskikh and Lapina (2021) utilized a descriptive method to study and recommend strategies for incorporating soft skill development into university English language classes. One recommended approach is to engage students in debates, which provides opportunities to practice communication, active listening, and presentation skills. The collaborative nature of debates also promotes teamwork and cooperation, as students take turns presenting and explaining their arguments. In addition, to equip students with collaborative skills, project work is introduced early on and is supported by step-by-step guidance, practical advice, and ongoing instruction.

Moustadraf's (2021) study examined Moroccan undergraduate engineering students' perception of the value of soft skills. Data were collected through a questionnaire from 255 students across four universities. The study found that active teaching methods, as opposed to traditional methods, were more effective in developing graduates' soft skills. Group work, internships, problem-solving approaches, role-playing, case studies, flipped classrooms, lectures, and project-based learning were the most important strategies for soft skills development, according to the students.



Azmi (2018) conducted a study on the impact of an English language environment provided by ICT on intercultural interactions and soft skills development among Moroccan students. In focus group interviews, students evaluated the effects of ICT-enhanced instructional materials and content on intercultural exchanges and personal development. The majority of respondents agreed that ICT enables students to engage in interactive discussions on global issues and promotes the dissemination and sharing of global values in the EFL classroom. Additionally, students believed that incorporating online web content and applications such as videos, podcasts, blogs, and photos enhanced the effectiveness of class delivery.

Based on the findings discussed above, several recommendations can be proposed for English department professors at the Ben Msik faculty of letters and humanities and other departments inside and outside Morocco. Firstly, it is crucial for teachers to prioritize the development of soft skills in EFL and other classes, and to incorporate various strategies into their lesson plans to assist students in honing these skills. Additionally, the results can inform curriculum designers in developing a soft skills curriculum that aligns with the preferences of students in this department. However, it is important to note that this research has some limitations. Future studies could adopt a collective case study design and involve students from multiple universities in the Casablanca-Settat region. Another interesting area for investigation is teachers' perceptions of the most effective soft skill development methodologies.

Ethics and Conflict of Interest

The authors acted in accordance with the ethical rules in the research. The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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