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Explore the Students' Perceptions, Experiences, and Feedback Regarding the Integration of Soft Skills and Language Learning

Sangeetha K[1]*, Dr. Ravi Yadav[2]

[1] Research Scholar, University of Technology, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

Email: Sangibharat29@gmail.com

[2] Professor, Department of English, University of Technology, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

Abstract - The importance of students acquiring soft skills is growing in today's more global industry. Employers nowadays are looking for graduates with strong soft skills as well as hard ones. Soft talents, as opposed to hard skills, are becoming increasingly important to certain firms. Most courses naturally include soft skills, which are useful for students who aren't technically minded. The situation may be different, however, for students majoring in technical fields. Their curriculum is heavily focused on practical skills. As a result, fewer pupils understand the value of soft skills. The research team behind this study hopes to learn how engineering students feel about the value of soft skills. The sample for this study consists of 150 engineering students from the University of Kuala Lumpur's Malaysia France Institute. Though they disagreed on the relative importance of the various components, students generally agreed that teachers played a crucial role and that they improved their cultural awareness, reading and listening comprehension, and ability to work independently. The data is collected via a questionnaire. The findings indicate that students are aware of the importance of soft skills for both their academic performance and their future careers. Two approaches that have been suggested as ways to help students develop their soft skills include problem-based learning and incorporating entrepreneurial elements into technical subjects.

Keywords: Student Awareness, Soft Skills, Hard Skills

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INTRODUCTION

U.S. foreign language classrooms have seen a meteoric rise in the use of technology—and multimedia in particular—in the last 20 years. The number of research documenting the impact of technology-enhanced education on student accomplishment and the attitudes of students towards technology-assisted learning has also been on the rise (Salaberry, 2001). While some of these studies have looked at how students perceive other forms of technology, the vast majority have focused on how students perceive e-mail and networking as forms of computer-mediated communication. (Cononelos & Oliva, 1993; Kern, 1996; Sanaoui & Lapkin, 1992; Warschauer, 1996), Beauvois (1994, 1996, 1998).

An analysis of how students felt about the incorporation of various forms of multimedia into a single course is detailed in this article. It details, in particular, how first-year university students taking Spanish programmes with an emphasis on technology felt about the use of such tools to improve their language skills. Electronic pen pals, online task-based exercises, a publisher-made interactive CD-ROM, and threaded conversations were all part of these seminars. There have been a lot of positive outcomes associated with students' use of technology in the classroom. Brownlee-Conyers (1996), Dwyer (1996), McGrath (1998), and Weiss (1994) all list higher-order thinking skills and improved recall as outcomes of more active processing, which in turn leads to more student-centered learning and engagement in the learning process. Furthermore, it seems that the use of multimedia to demonstrate ideas and arrange factual material has a positive impact, particularly on pupils with low achievement levels (Nowaczyk, 1998).

Students also seem to build self-assurance when they are in charge of their own education. A study conducted at a Model Technology School in California found that students who participated in learning-by-doing in an interactive setting developed into "knowledge navigators"—independent learners.

In today's interconnected world, students must possess strong soft skills as part of their competency set. There is no assurance that a

student will obtain a decent job just because they graduated with honours. Today, a combination of strong academic credentials and marketable soft skills is required to get a successful job. It is becoming more difficult to get a job in today's competitive labour market due to the increasing number of highly qualified applicants. Having strong soft skills is essential, not only in the work market, but also when applying to prestigious universities and majors. Some universities require prospective students to conduct an interview even if they have achieved perfect scores on the Malaysia Certificate of Examination. One goal of the interview process is to gauge the candidate's level of soft skills. Soft skills are an integral aspect of their university curriculum. In comparison to students enrolled in engineering and pure scientific programmes, individuals pursuing social or social science degrees may find that they develop more marketable soft skills. Reason being, group projects are an integral part of the curriculum for the majority of the courses offered. Students are really learning valuable "soft skills" like working together, managing their time effectively, being flexible, solving problems, and giving effective presentations as they complete their group work assignments. This is not the case for students majoring in pure or technological sciences. They are required to get practical, hands-on experience in the majority of their classes.

According to Catelly (2011), the primary goal of engineering education is to provide students "hard skills," which include things like "specialty/subject knowledge," "applying information technology," "using tools to model information systems," and so on. Academic and technical brilliance used to be more valued, but now they are less so due to the increased expectations placed on higher education as a consequence of globalisation. As a result, the importance of soft skills was reassessed and elevated. Universiti Kuala Lumpur has prioritised the development of soft skills for its engineering students in light of the present scenario. It is important to evaluate students' levels of comprehension and awareness of the value of soft skills to guarantee that they can really develop them throughout their academic careers. Therefore, this research primarily aims to examine engineering students' perspectives on the significance of soft skills in their academic and professional development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rosencrum EC and Davlin-Pater C. (2021), Our goal: It is unrealistic to expect pupils to naturally develop highly prized "soft skills" and "professional behaviours" in the absence of formal training and regular practice. Developing a strong sense of professional identity at a young age may inspire and enable pupils to strive for greatness. The purpose of this study was to investigate and characterise the views of first-year athletic training students on online learning modules that aim to foster the development of soft skills. The research strategy relied on a qualitative method. We created a course outline that emphasises the importance of professional values and the cultivation of soft skills using an online learning module system. It was put into practice at two schools that provide master's degrees in sports training at the professional level. The first term of each programme was enough time for students to do the required coursework. A total of fourteen students from two different master's degree programmes in professional sports training participated in the study. We used email and in-person invitations to recruit students from two specific programmes for the research. We gathered information from students' course artefacts, survey results, and semi-structured focus group interviews. In order to ensure that the data was trustworthy, we conducted continual, inductive, constant comparison analyses and made use of peer debriefing and member verification. The findings show that the participants valued the time-saving approach and practice-relevant breadth of the attention given to professional behaviours. The importance of personal development, interpersonal communication and teamwork, and "soft skills" were the three overarching themes that emerged from the research. Conclusion: Educators in the field of athletic training should seriously consider devoting more time and energy to the instruction of professional conduct and soft skills. Doing it in a way that students see as beneficial is another important consideration for educators**.**

Professor Sakthivel Murugan (2020), Soft talents are in high demand in India's economy. An individual's ability to communicate, manage themselves, be creative, work in a team, lead, and provide excellent customer service is crucial in the service industry. Both personal and professional advancement, as well as financial success and market penetration, are being impacted by the importance of soft skills. Several platforms have brought attention to the importance of investing in the development of soft skills, particularly for the educated jobless. Most educated young people without jobs lack the soft skills that employers look for since our country's educational system has so far failed to prioritise their development. Impact of soft skill training on college students' employability in Tamil Nadu is the focus of this research.

Huo, X. (2020), Through an examination of how students see ESL instructors who are not native English speakers, I provide a student viewpoint on the same topic in this chapter. Students' socio-historical contexts, opinions on the function of English, impressions of teachers who are native and non-native English speakers, and how those impressions change over time are the four facets that are investigated. Family history, cultural context, and students' political and social identities in Canada are all parts of students' socio-historical locales. Everyone who took the survey understands how crucial English is. They see native English speakers' strengths such as

accurate and fluent listening and speaking, a large vocabulary, and a firm grasp of assignment expectations and their weaknesses such as a lack of empathy, a lack of understanding, a reluctance to help, or inadequate assistance. The claimed benefits of non-native English-speaking teachers of English as a second language (ESL) students stem from their cultural variety and experiences, which helps them empathise with their students' struggles, pay closer attention to more details, be patient, and care about their students' learning results. Their accents, poor grammatical skills, and unfamiliarity with cultural writing conventions and expectations are seen as their main drawbacks. In addition, I deduce the causes of the changes in students' perspectives and talk about how they came to be.

In a 2014 study by Maryam Tajzad1 and Seyyed Ali Ostovar-Namagh, The purpose of this qualitative research is to investigate how students of English as a foreign language see the integrated skills method of language instruction. Researchers achieved this goal by presenting the integrated skills approach to 30 participants and conducting in-depth interviews with individuals who were open to sharing their perspectives and experiences. To gather and analyse interview data, the researchers relied on grounded theory. Until theoretical saturation was achieved, data was collected and analysed iteratively. The legitimacy of the temporary and final categories was established by confirming with members. It is evident from the findings that the participants had a good impression of this strategy. Everyone from policymakers to practitioners to students should be aware of the consequences of the results.

METHODOLOGY

The research surveyed 150 engineering majors at the UniKL Malaysia France Institute. Mechatronics, Mechanical, Industrial Automation and Robotics, Welding and Quality Inspection, and other engineering degree programmes were represented among the students. The majority of the questions on the survey are closed-ended, although students were given space to elaborate or offer further details when asked. In the survey, we wanted to know how students conceptualised "soft skills," how they felt about their significance, and which "soft skills" they valued most. The importance of each of the soft skills included in the survey was graded on a scale from 1 to 5. The range from 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important) is rather broad. The survey also inquired about the students' perceptions on the soft skills they had picked up throughout their time in school. The collected data is then examined via the use of descriptive statistics and SPSS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following table shows data analysis and findings of this study.

Understanding of soft skill

The main purpose of the questions presented here is to find out whether the students have a good grasp of the concept of soft skills. They wanted to know what students thought were the most important "soft skills" from their perspective. A set of twelve "soft skills" was compiled from prior research. It is up to the students to decide the abilities they think are important in a soft skill. Of the 150 people who took the survey, 93.3% saw communication as a soft talent, whereas 90.7% saw leadership, 88.7% saw cooperation ability, and 88% saw creativity. Business acumen, conflict resolution, and time management are just a few examples of the abilities that over half of respondents did not think of as soft talents. The majority of their coursework is focused on technical topics; therefore, they likely do not have much opportunity to develop soft skills.

Table 1: Soft skill consideration by respondent

No	Types of Soft Skills	Frequency
1	Communication	140
2	Leadership	136
3	Teamwork capability	133
4	Creative	132
5	Problem solving	125
6	Critical thinking	82
7	Common Knowledge	64
8	Negotiating skills	62
9	Responsibility	61
10	Business Management	57
11	Conflict Management	55
12	Time management	54

Perception on the importance of soft skills

The significance of soft skills was perceived by students and their opinions were examined in here. Depending on the statement, respondents may choose to "Strongly agree," "Agree," "Neutral," "Strongly disagree," or "Strongly disagree" on the questionnaire. The majority of respondents said that having good interpersonal and communication skills would help them get a better job. While the majority of respondents (76.7% to be exact) believe that soft skills are an asset when applying for jobs, over half (52%) still believe that they may acquire a high-paying job even without them. This

demonstrates that they did not associate a high-paying job with a better job. A large majority of respondents (85.3% to be exact) believe that companies place a premium on soft skills when hiring new staff, and a similar percentage (77.3% to be exact) believe that these talents are critical for advancing one's career. Soft skills, according to more than half of respondents, are more difficult to acquire than technical knowledge. This is likely caused by the fact that the respondents' chosen subject matter places more emphasis on technical abilities rather than interpersonal ones. It is well-known that the majority of engineering courses place a strong emphasis on practical, technical skills. As an example, out of thirty to forty required courses, students pursuing a Bachelor of Engineering Technology in Welding Quality Inspection often take just seven or ten non-technical classes. What this means is that students spend the majority of their classroom time studying practical skills, such as operating a welding equipment, accurately measuring materials for welding, and so on. On the other hand, pupils struggled to develop their soft skills. Their ability to communicate, work in a team, lead, and solve problems may suffer if they aren't involved in extracurricular activities at university.

Table 2: Students perception on the importance of soft skills

No	Statements	SD	DA	N	A	SA
1	I consider myself a shaving value added if I have some soft skills.	2	6	10	122	10
2	I can get better job if I equipped myself with soft skills.	6	13	5	115	11
3	I feel it is difficult to acquire soft skills compared to technical knowledge.	12	41	8	80	9
4	I think soft skills are less important than technical knowledge.	2	89	4	37	18
5	I still can get a job with high pay even though I did not have soft skills.	7	42	9	78	14
6	I believe that nowadays soft skills are really required by employers.	3	5	6	128	8
7	I also believe that soft skills are important for career development.	1	14	7	116	12
8	I think soft skills is "must have" skills not only "good to have" skills	1	26	22	98	3

SD: strongly disagree, D: disagree, N: neutral, A: agree, SA: strongly agree

Soft skill that perceived important for job employment

According to the results, 84% of those surveyed considered leadership to be a crucial soft talent for every position. There may be more job opportunities for graduates who can demonstrate leadership abilities than for those who cannot. The capacity to work well with others is considered to be one of the most valuable soft talents in the job market. To be able to collaborate with others, about 82.7% of those who took the survey think you need collaboration abilities. Employers often hesitate to recruit recent graduates who lack the ability to work well with others because of the potential problems they might cause in the future. The majority of respondents (78.7%) ranked effective communication as one of the most important "soft skills" sought for by employers, right up there with leadership and collaboration. Presentation, proposal writing, and general knowledge abilities were ranked by respondents as the least significant soft skills for employment. The exposure and comprehension of students towards the work scope of engineers could impact their opinions. As an engineer, they could assume that their presentation skills, proposal writing abilities, and general knowledge aren't put to use.

Table 3: Soft skills that most important for job employment

No	Types of soft skills	Frequency
1	Leadership	126
2	Teamwork capability	124
3	Communication	118
4	Willingness to learn	94
5	Creative	72
6	Critical thinking	70
7	Passion and optimism	65
8	Negotiating skills	56
9	Writing business communications	42
10	Making presentation	37
11	Writing proposal	37
12	Common knowledge	21

Acquisition and improvement on soft skills

The survey concluded with a section asking participants to reflect on the "soft skills" they had developed. The percentage of those who said they had developed their leadership abilities is low, at 61.3%. Their participation in extracurricular activities, both on and off school, is likely the source of this. They also believe they have mastered the next soft skill: collaboration. One probable explanation for such is the group projects that are required for the majority of the classes. No one who took the survey considers themselves to be proficient in business writing. This is undoubtedly due to engineering students' scant exposure to business subjects. Some of the soft skills that people feel may need some work include negotiation (identified by 94.7% of respondents), critical thinking (identified by 81.3% of respondents), and general knowledge (identified by 76% of respondents). In most engineering curricula, students will not learn these softer skills. Therefore, having such talents throughout one's tenure as an engineering student may be rather challenging.

Perceptions Concerning the Effect on Learning

Time Invested Almost 71% of the students felt that they invested more time on the technology-enhanced course than they would have in a regular Spanish class. Slightly over 36% "strongly agreed" with this response. Time on task may be considered to be a learning benefit, since it is frequently cited as a factor in achievement, and was found to be important in this respect in Glisan, Dudt, and Howe's study (1998).

Learning of Culture About two-thirds of the students felt that the TELL atmosphere had taught them more about Hispanic culture than a typical classroom setting (67.6%), and nearly half of those students said that the lab activities had a significant impact on their understanding of Hispanic culture (65.4%). The results support the hypothesis that technology increases cultural awareness, which was proposed by Sanaoui and Lapkin (1992). Despite this advancement in cultural understanding, the current research shows that very few students were really interested in culture to go out and learn more about it. For some reason, only 17.0% of people agreed with the statement, "I returned to Hispanic -related sites that I used or found on the Web to explore further on my own." Since the course creators had planned to inspire students to pursue long-term learning objectives connected to Hispanic culture, this result was discouraging.

Proficiency in Effective Communication Students generally agreed that the lab exercises helped them improve their communication abilities, however most only partially agreed. By the end of the lab, over two-thirds of the participants felt that their Spanish hearing and reading abilities had been enhanced (65.9% and 63.4%, respectively). The results of Glisan et al. (1998) about increased listening skills and the views of Beauvois (1994) and Lunde (1990) regarding improved reading skills are supported by these perceptions of enhanced technology-based listening and reading abilities.

Value of Specific Components When asked about the particular ways in which the interactive CD-ROM aided their learning, 52.2% of students felt they had gained a substantial quantity of knowledge. The students' stated views of better listening abilities appear to be contradicted by this result, given the CD-ROM was the only component that included any listening practice. In addition, the CD-ROM had a feature that enabled the visual display of audio contents, enabling students to read texts aloud to improve their understanding. Captioning movies in the target language improved students' listening comprehension, according to research by Markham (1999). Despite students' mixed feelings regarding the CD-ROM's educational potential, it would have to be blamed if their listening abilities had improved, as shown on the survey's general questions.

While the Internet-based exercises were based on real-life situations, only 43% of students said they had learned a lot from them. Additionally, only 54.2% thought the assignments were relevant to real-life Spanish demands. It seems that the first result runs counter to what the students thought—that their reading abilities had improved. Students were not only given written application assignments, but also reading comprehension exercises and substantial volumes of actual materials to complete as part of the online activities. The rise in reading proficiency, if any, would have been attributable mostly to the time spent online. While students may have linked their stated increases in cultural knowledge to the online activities, they failed to recognize a connection between the authentic cultural and linguistic content of the online activities and their enhancements in reading comprehension and cultural knowledge. We need to dig further into this connecting failure.

Proficient Writing Ability When asked to assess the overall impact of technology-enhanced training on writing skills, only half of the students felt that their abilities had grown. Less than half of those who participated in the threaded conversation and about a third of those who participated in the pen buddy activities thought they had learnt a lot. In addition, students did not seem to think that any of the writing activities—whether it was online writing, pen pal letters, or threaded discussion—contributed much to the improvement of writing abilities, as just 43% of students assigned learning value to these online pursuits. According to research by Conrad (1999), first-semester language students placed a lower importance on writing abilities than their fourth-semester counterparts. This may account for our results, given that most of the participants were first-semester college students. Unlike the research by Beauvois (1998), this one did not include formal mistake correction or specific writing training. Sanaoui and Lapkin's (1992) proposed activities were more in line with the experiential aspect of this course's activities. "Communication of meaning prevailed over error avoidance and accuracy in speaking and some components of writing practice" (p. 535) in this email group project. Participants' language skills did improve, however the researchers did find a "...need to emphasise the procedural aspects of writing through an explicit process-centered approach" (p. 544). Instructors were reminded that "...second language writing instruction directed mostly to the ... use of the second language will not necessarily improve learners' writing abilities" (p. 550).

In addition, the graduate TAs who worked with the students in this research reported that students often rushed to "get the job done" while completing their projects in follow-up focus groups at Florida State University. As a consequence of students hurried to finish their Internet work before lab ended, the quality of their work was likely compromised, and the work was subsequently undervalued. This was in stark contrast to the

networking experiment described by Beauvois (1994), in which students said they were given more time to think about their answers and felt less rushed. Students reported feeling comfortable enough to reply at their own speed while yet being able to carefully observe grammatical rules and formulate their thoughts in that project's lab. Finally, the Internet and threaded discussion assignments' grading system did not take work quality into account. Students were granted credit automatically for finished work, and no explicit feedback was offered. Even though TAs were required to mark pen pal letters, they worried that students would carry the same speed and accuracy into their pen pal activities as they did in their online and threaded discussion projects.

In conclusion, although at least two-thirds of the students felt that their reading and listening comprehension and cultural awareness had improved, not a single piece of technology was considered to have contributed significantly to their education. Almost half of those who took the course said they gained greater knowledge of the Spanish language than they would have in a typical Spanish class. Since students strongly indicated that the technology-enhanced class demanded a substantial time commitment, their perceptions regarding the learning value of the individual components and the TELL experience as a whole may have been impacted by their feelings of powerlessness over time constraints. Even while most people claimed to finish their online tasks in an hour or less, over 37% were not in agreement. As a result, a lot of people felt rushed to complete their lab assignments. Particularly among low-achieving students, Nowaczyk (1998) discovered that time constraints had a detrimental impact on students' views of multimedia's efficacy.

RECOMMENDATION

Students at this institution recognize the value of soft skills for their future careers and further education, but they are unable to develop these competencies due to the present method of instruction. The institution may address this problem by implementing the following suggestions.

Common sense and the ability to think critically are examples of the "soft skills" that every learner should have. One potential solution may be to make problem-based and student-centered learning the norm in all technical courses. Students are presented with real-life problems during teaching and learning sessions in a problem-based learning (PBL) method. Students hone their analytical and problem-solving abilities while strengthening their capacity to draw meaningful connections between previously learned material and real-world applications. Students enrolled in an engineering design course, for instance, may be required to complete projects tied to real-world industries; this would allow them to research the issue at hand and, perhaps, provide a workable solution. Students gain self-assurance as they practice interacting with real-life professionals with this task, which also helps them build their critical thinking skills.

CONCLUSION

One reason graduates in Malaysia aren't finding jobs is because they lack soft skills. Some recent grads get work, but they aren't moving up the corporate ladder because they lack marketable soft skills. The problem of students' lack of soft skills may not be as serious for those who aren't majoring in engineering. The courses given in non-technical programmes tend to focus more on developing soft skills. On the other hand, the courses provided to engineering majors tend to be more technical in nature, with an emphasis on hard skills. Students are expected to acquire both technical and soft skills via a problem-based learning strategy that incorporates entrepreneurial components into technical subjects. Because students' soft skills are an asset to potential employers, this boosts their employability.

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Corresponding Author

Sangeetha K*

Research Scholar, University of Technology, Jaipur, Rajasthan, India

Email: Sangibharat29@Gmail.Com