

From Campus to Career: The Influence of Soft Skills on Employability

Rachid Elkhayma¹, Mohamed Ezzaidi²

¹Soft Skills and Communication, ENSAM, Casablanca, Morocco

²Communication, Semlalia School of Science, Marrakech, Morocco

Article information	Abstract
DOI : 10.25077/jds.2.1.16-28.2025 Correspondence : rachidelkhayma@gmail.com	World economies have become more globalized and interconnected, with new advanced aspects of employment that are highly automated and technological. This leads to new work requirements that have rapidly been evolving since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Performing in such a competitive environment necessitates qualified job candidates who are not only competent in hard knowledge but also in soft skills. This forces employers to look for graduates with strong interpersonal and problem-solving skills, and a significant ability to manage various tasks and missions. In this context, this paper investigates the status of soft skills, students' and employers' attitudes towards them, and the possible merit and / or insignificance attributed to these skills for the student's current educational and later professional endeavor. 120 Engineering and Science students from Hassan II and Cadi Ayyad Universities and 15 Casablanca and Rabat-based companies participated in the study. The findings reveal that both students and employers give greater importance to soft skills as essential requirements for job finding and employment success.
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INTRODUCTION

The dynamic landscape of the business world, characterized by intense competition and rapid evolution, underscores the need for a workforce that is skilled in both technical proficiency and effective communication skills (Brown et al., 2003). Employers in today's labor market recognize the value of individuals who demonstrate proficiency in both hard and soft skills (Deepa & Seth, 2013; Stewart et al., 2016). While knowledge and technical expertise remain highly valued, the ability to solve problems in a team setting is considered equally important for job security and career advancement (Schein, 1996). Research suggests that graduates who rely solely on technical training may face challenges in the workplace or even termination due to poor communication or ethical behavior (Tulgan, 2015). Rick Stephens, Boeing's vice president of human resources, underscores the importance of considering soft skills in hiring, emphasizing that an exclusive focus on hard skills can lead to the termination of employees with inadequate soft skills (Gordon, 2005). Employers agree that a harmonious blend of technical expertise and effective communication and teamwork skills is essential for success in today's job market.

The ubiquity of soft skills is underscored by Boukar (2021), founder of Soft Skills Maroc, who notes that over 75% of jobs in the U.S. labor market require particular soft skills. These skills include effective listening, clear communication, problem solving, reading comprehension, self-assessment, understanding others' reactions, coordination, decision-making, time management, and written communication skills (Boukar, 2021). In a study by Hairi et al. (2011) on employers' perceptions of power skills in Malaysia, both local and multinational companies agree on the importance of communication, critical thinking, teamwork, project management, decision-making, and problem solving as key generic skills (Hairi et al., 2011). The French Sapien Think-Thank Institute's 2021 project on transferable skills and employability identified a high demand for these skills in the French labor market (Tison, 2021). In line with these

findings, IBM France emphasizes the importance of behavioral skills in recruitment criteria, giving equal importance to soft skills and technical skills. Laurent Vronski, Director of EVRON, agrees with the findings of the Sapien Institute and points out that 90% of recruitment failures are due to a lack of these skills, underlining the costly impact on companies.

In the context of an evolving work environment, as in Morocco, this research explores the nuanced interplay between soft skills and employability. Several studies have been carried out in Morocco on the importance of soft skills in education and how to advance them. To the best of our knowledge, exploring employers' opinions and perceptions of soft skills and provide them as tangible insights for science and engineering students and graduates looking for job opportunities is an area of study that still lacks research in Moroccan academia. The present study examines employers' views of soft skills, their attitudes towards them and their importance, if there is any, in the Moroccan labor market, and whether they use them in job interviews. It also examines engineering and science students' perceptions of soft skills and how important they may be to their current educational performance and future career success. In order to explore these areas, the following research questions are addressed in this paper:

1. What soft skills are most valued by employers?
2. How important are soft skills to employers?
3. What is the current level of awareness and understanding among students of the importance of soft skills in relation to employability and education?
4. How do students perceive the importance of soft skills compared to hard skills?

As definitions, the term "soft skills" originated in the late 1960s in the U.S. Army to refer to skills that transcend technology and encompass diverse qualities (Litecky, et al., 2004), such as leadership, team inspiration, and strategic decision-making. These skills require essential social and cognitive qualities that can make them critical (Nye Jr., 2008). Soft skills are invaluable personal attributes that underpin interpersonal interactions, including effective communication, emotional intelligence, teamwork, leadership, and temporal dexterity (Baker, 1970). Various synonymous labels such as interpersonal skills, leadership skills, and competencies aligned with the demands of the twenty-first century have emerged in academic discourse (Touati, 2023). Empirical research substantiates the effects of aptitude in soft skills, facilitating the understanding of personal and professional challenges (Carnevale, 1990). Conversely, hard skills refer to specific competencies that are in line with job roles (Badawy, 1995; Morgeson et al., 2005), and are acquired through formal education, experiential training, or through personal efforts. The contemporary emphasis on diverse workplace issues underscores the growing dominance of soft skills over hard skills (Brunello & Schlotter, 2011). Although not really superior, soft skills remain endowed with true value, prompting a scholarly tendency to prioritize them over technical competencies (Levasseur, 2013).

Historically, engineering and science schools around the world, from the earliest educational systems until the 1970s, focused primarily on technology and science, neglecting the humanities and social sciences (Shuman et al., 2005). The humanistic approach that emerged during this period prompted a shift that incorporated the humanities and social sciences into engineering and science institutions. This shift emphasized the development of oral and written communication skills alongside technical knowledge, preparing students to express themselves effectively (Richards, 2005). The goal of this inclusion was to equip students to work and communicate in diverse, multicultural business and scientific environments, which is critical for collaborating and learning from technological innovations across nations in the field of engineering.

Governments and researchers around the world have endorsed this shift, advocating for the integration of vocational skills into engineering and science education. In Europe, initiatives such as the Bologna Process and the ERASMUS project, in place since the late 1980s, promote lifelong training and

mobility to acquire skills for the labor market (Cinque, 2016). ERASMUS has a significant impact on soft skills, especially teamwork and intercultural communication, accounting for up to 41% of its overall mission (Enders et al., 2011). The Bologna Process emphasizes the creation of a transversal link between education and employers by aligning marketable skills with disciplinary knowledge to meet the demands of the labour market (Bourke, 2005).

In the early 1990s, there was growing recognition in the United States of the need to reform engineering education by incorporating social, environmental, historical, and global perspectives in addition to technical knowledge (Shuman et al., 2005). The National Academy of Engineering (NAE) and the Accreditation Council for Engineering and Technology advocated for the integration of soft skills, emphasizing attributes such as teamwork, systems thinking, and creative design (Murphy et al., 2013). In Japan, criticism in 1963 led to educational reforms in the late 1980s that aligned education with the needs of industry by training graduates in skills such as autonomy, persuasiveness, creativity, and a spirit of challenge (Negishi, 1993, cited in Doyon, 2001). China's rapid social and economic development since the 1980s led to the recognition of the need for greater skill integration in higher education (Morgan & Wu, 2011). This shift was driven by employers seeking graduates with social skills such as communication, leadership, and empathy. Educational reforms in 2001 aimed to develop learners who could think critically and solve real-world problems (Rayn, 2011).

In Morocco, higher education traditionally prioritized knowledge acquisition over the development of soft skills. Reforms since the early 2000s have aimed to meet the needs of the labor market with a greater emphasis on hard skills. However, the 2015-2030 Strategic Vision recognizes the importance of incorporating soft skills. This includes measures to improve communication skills, such as hiring language teachers and improving English proficiency through English language streams and proficiency requirements for doctorate students. The question is whether this reform has really started to help students develop their communication and employability skills.

These changes represent a recognition of the importance of soft skills in preparing graduates for the labor market, and reflect a shift toward a holistic approach to education that aims to equip graduates with both hard and soft skills for better employability opportunities.

METHOD

Study Design

The current study is mainly quantitative. The data collection instrument comprises two questionnaires with almost all questions as closed-ended ones, except three, which are open-ended. The purpose for including some open-ended survey items is to generate more information through giving respondents the choice to express their thoughts freely. The rationale for prioritizing quantitative data is to provide sufficient information about students' and employers' opinions of soft skills. The study also sets to explore employers' perceptions of and attitudes towards soft skills, and how crucial they may be in the job market for both recruiters and graduates. Besides, it investigates engineering and science students' opinions of them, as well as the potential value, if there is any, attributed to these skills for the students' current educational and later professional endeavor.

Participants

The sampling population consists of students and employers. 120 Engineering and Science students from ENSAM-Casablanca and Semlalia School of Science at Qadi Ayyad University in Marrakech took part in the study. Twenty employers represented by big companies based in Casablanca and Rabat regions, Morocco also participated by responding to our questionnaire.

Procedure

The researchers contacted as many employers-participants as they could, and they ended up with 20

completed questionnaires. These participants were selected based on a convenience sampling technique given the fact that some of them were available at the research sites, whereas others were deemed accessible by the researchers using emails and work phone numbers. Moreover, the researchers used the SPSS statistical package version 20 to analyze the data obtained from the employers' and recruiters' surveys.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The findings presented in this section are based on the data collected from employers and students. The discussion is conducted in the context of the research questions highlighted in the introduction.

It has been found that the most valued soft skills by employers are communication skills (80% of the respondents' answers), emotional intelligence (60%), adaptability (60%), listening skills (50%), and time management (45%). The ability to work in groups, have confidence in oneself, and solve problems are similarly important for them, as shown in Figure 1. This indicates that they recognize the value placed on these skills in the job market. They also value candidates who can express ideas clearly, listen actively, and communicate with a variety of audiences. For them, the ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing is essential. They also recognize the significance of emotional intelligence in fostering positive workplace relationships and resolving disputes, which includes self-awareness, empathy, and the ability to deal with social situations because, as one respondent notes, "we are not going to hire robots."

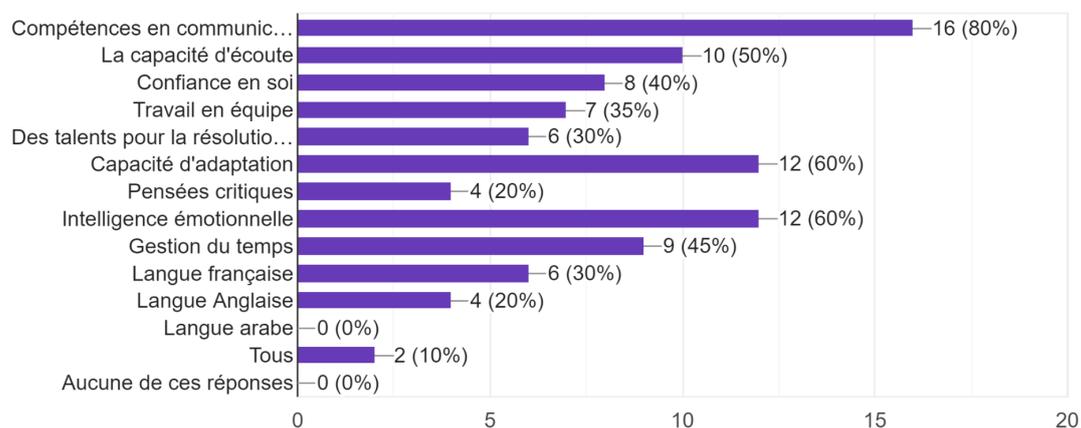


Fig. 1. According to employers, what are the most important soft skills in recruitment?

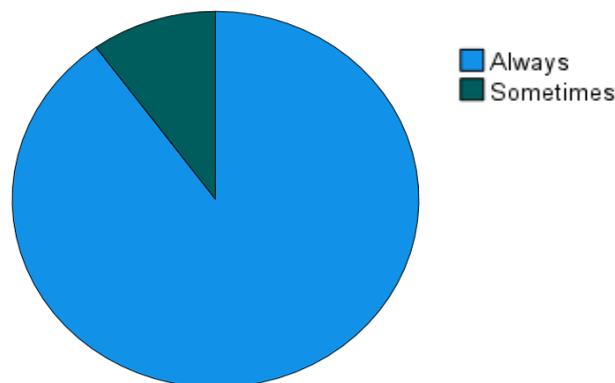
Besides, effective time management for them, with a percentage of 45% of participants' answers, is a highly valued skill that candidates should acquire. The ability to prioritize tasks, meet deadlines, and handle multiple responsibilities are all essential components of this skill set. It allows them "to thrive in a collaborative work environment and to adapt to the changing challenges of the professional world," as another respondent noted. Adaptability is also crucial in such a rapidly changing business environment. 60 percent of employers voted for it. They are looking for candidates who can adapt, learn quickly, and remain flexible. Moreover, they place a high value on employees who can work effectively in a team, offer innovative ideas, and collaborate with colleagues. In a team-based work environment, "the ability to build positive relationships and manage conflicts is essential," says another respondent.

Therefore, the value employers give to soft skills is undeniably vital, and whilst technical qualifications are necessary, the mastery of soft skills often determines graduates' ability to apply their knowledge in real-life situations, and create a positive and productive work environment. As one employer explained, "the diploma is not enough to have better productivity"; this is why a significant number of employers view soft skills as critical to long-term productivity, career success, and the ability to adapt to constantly evolving job requirements. In addition, as workplaces are becoming more and more diverse and collaborative, the importance of soft skills in fostering successful communication and teamwork is increasing. This seems to be remarkably evident in employers' opinions, as illustrated in Table 1, wherein 95% of them share agreement and 60% reveal strong agreement.

Table 1. I believe soft skills are important for my employees.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I strongly agree	13	65.0	65.0	65.0
	I agree	6	30.0	30.0	95.0
	I'm not sure	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

We have also discovered that almost all recruiters are keen to ask candidates questions to find out about their self-perception of such must-have skills (Figure 2). Almost all of them “always” seek to assess interviewees’ soft knowledge. One of the first things they consider when hiring engineers, for instance, is how well they communicate and how emotionally intelligent they are. These and other competencies enable these engineering or science students to deal with a variety of professional challenges and solve different problems and situations they may encounter once they start the job. In addition, most employers state that the priority today is for performance skills. This perspective and others confirm similar ones found in the literature, and is consistent with the existing body of research on these transferable skills (Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Dixon et al., 2010; Schulz, 2008; de Campos et al., 2020; Itani & Srour, 2016). They actually reiterate the increasing attention given to soft skills in job interviews. As cited in the review, there are many reasons why companies prioritize professional skills over technical ones, and we can summarize them in an international recruiter’s quote that reads: “We hire for hard skills; we fire for soft skills” (Jacobson-Lundeborg, 2013, p. 26). This meaningfully loaded speech illustrates that these skills are not only conspicuously vital for employment, but also for maintaining and advancing a professional career.

**Fig. 2. When recruiting, how often do you ask graduates about soft skill?**

Additionally, many employers (45 percent of them agree with the target question) affirm that they cannot hire a candidate unless he or she shows convincing interpersonal potential (Table 2). As companies face fierce competition, they tend to attract skilled graduates who can help spread the company’s reputation and contribute to the development of its productivity. In addition, employers’ efforts to make profits and expand their businesses lead them to emphasize the need for interpersonal skills in job applications and interviews. Such requirements underscore the positive impact these skills can have on employee effectiveness. Achieving efficiency requires that engineers (a) be willing to work in teams and collaborate with colleagues, (b) demonstrate that they can properly lead other group members in crucial moments, (c) act quickly and wisely in an emergency, (d) manage time accurately to meet project deadlines, and so on. For these and other reasons, companies insist on soft skills because of their paramount necessity for both the growth of job seekers and the business at large. However, this insistence cannot ignore the equal value ascribed to hard skills, which are similarly crucial, and this can be validated by the 35% of participants who showed uncertainty and the 15% who revealed disagreement. To create an unequivocal balance, Chou (2013) rightly argues that if hard skills can allow us to qualify for jobs, life skills are highly likely to pave the way for us to grow.

Table 2. Employers do not hire graduates who are not good at soft skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I strongly agree	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
	I agree	9	45.0	45.0	50.0
	I'm not sure	7	35.0	35.0	85.0
	I disagree	3	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Moreover, in job interviews, it can be argued that employers are not only seeking technically proficient candidates, but also those who can deliver a motivational speech and present a convincing performance in French. The target graduates are the ones who can manage their emotions, adapt quickly to different work environments, communicate effectively with workers and colleagues, and speak French fluently. This emphasis on French shows that it effectively holds a prestigious position as the main language of employment. It still ranks higher than English even though the latter is the world's number one language for engineering, science and technology. One of the reasons is that French is the main language of instruction that these graduates and their employers had at university. They were taught in French, had to use French in curricular and extracurricular activities, and graduated in French. Their employers, in turn, conduct most of their business in French. As a result, they need a French-speaking employee even if he / she may have little English or little or no Arabic, as shown in Figure 1 above wherein 30% of employers preferred French to English (20%) and Arabic (0%).

There are several other reasons why French is so dominant in the job market. In terms of education, French is the main language of instruction in scientific and technical institutions of higher education. French schools, in turn, have a good reputation as they are believed to provide quality education. They are mostly attended by the elite, as their tuition fees are above the Moroccan standard of living, and this, among other things, makes them well-established and prestigious. Economically, since the Moroccan economy is historically linked to many French companies operating in the country, local and international companies seek French-speaking employees to enable communication with French-speaking clients and partners. Knowledge of the French language is therefore seen as a key tool that significantly enhances job opportunities. Politically and diplomatically, French is indispensable in government and diplomatic positions, and opens new opportunities for entry into these fields. In many international conferences and events, Moroccan officials are more likely to use French as their formal means of communication.

Furthermore, it has been observed that evaluating candidates' soft skills during job interviews is a high priority for recruiters. In their search for qualified personnel, employers consider assessing graduates' power skills with questions that determine their problem-solving abilities, level of intelligence, communication and persuasion talents, and so on. As some employers assess graduates' soft skills as they do not want to "hire robots," others insist that these skills have become "primal" and "indispensable." It is now clear that companies are more likely to hire candidates whose interpersonal skills outweigh their technical ones. As shown in Table 3 below, 45% of respondents confirm the fact that they can hire a graduate who is better at soft skills than at hard knowledge, and this is supported by a significant body of research such as Schooley (2017), Biggers (2021), Carnochan et al. (2014), Idrus and Abdullah (2009), and others. This reality does not conceal the fact that some job seekers can be hired based on their hard knowledge only, or without any soft skills at all, because some might argue that. This is why an

Table 3. Can employers hire a graduate whose soft skills outweigh their hard skills?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	8	40.0	40.0	40.0
	No	3	15.0	15.0	55.0
	Maybe	9	45.0	45.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

overarching skill set that combines hard skills and technical skills is often highly recommended.

As for the students-participants, it is revealed that they have considerable understanding of soft skills and their significance in employment. These students are exposed to various forms of power skills in their classes and in extracurricular activities. In addition to the extensive hard skills programs they go through, their universities promote and incorporate academic opportunities for them to develop these employability competencies. On this basis, engineering and science students are well aware of a variety of soft skills as indicated by Figure 3 below. The big discrepancy is that some Moroccan students think Arabic is useful, but employers do not consider it a power skill at all. This is an essential revelation for our students to learn, and we believe as practitioners that most of them are cognizant of the underprivileged status of Arabic compared to the privileged one given to French and English as the leading languages in the Moroccan job market, mainly in private companies or what is locally attributed to as the private sector.

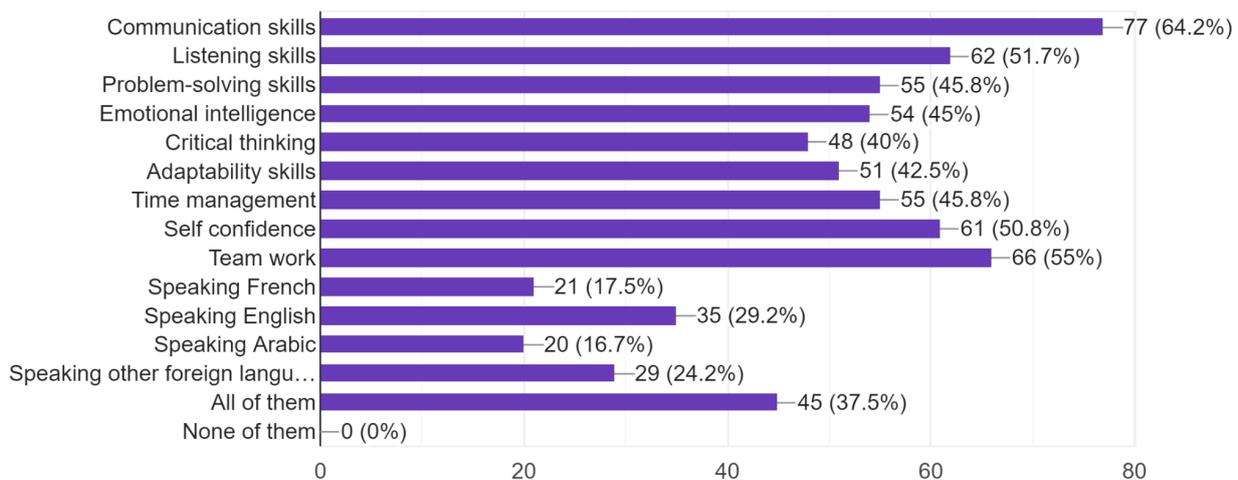


Fig. 3. Which of the following constitutes soft skills?

Whilst the importance of each power skill may vary from a student to another, the majority of students appear to value soft skills and seek to develop them. As illustrated in Figure 4, more than 99% of students expressed their readiness to learn about soft skills. Their awareness grows as they progress through their studies and gain real-world and marketplace experience. The more they learn about the critical role that soft skills play in employability, the more they realize that hard skills alone may not serve them well in the job market. Through experience, students have realized that in order to achieve professional and leadership growth, they need to demonstrate convincing interpersonal team-building and communication skills with clients and partners. They have also started to understand that marketable skills contribute not only to their personal growth as students and professionals, but also to their professional reputation in the workplace, which can have a positive or negative impact on their image. These findings have been asserted in the literature by Tison from the Sapien Institute (2021), Tulgan (2015), Idrus and Abdullah (2009), and others such as Schulz (2008) and Succi and Canovi (2020).

In this regard, the most important professional skills for engineering and science students are communication, self-confidence, teamwork, problem solving, time management, and English. For employers, French is prioritized over English, whereas students consider English to be more important. The reason for this disparity is that our students are more influenced by English given its international status as the world's number one language in engineering and science, although French is still dominant in many Moroccan companies, as referred to earlier.

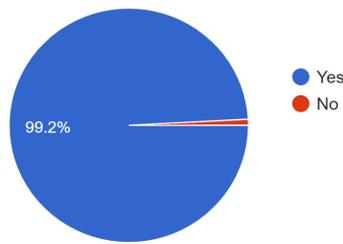


Fig. 4. Do students like to learn about soft skills?

It has also been found that soft skills constitute an integral part of engineering and science students' education. These students are truly conscious of the fact that these competencies contribute to effective learning, academic achievement, and educational success. In this way, good communication skills help them understand complex technical concepts, ask questions, and seek clarification inside and outside the learning environment, whereas critical thinking and problem solving competencies enable them to analyze and solve engineering and science problems more effectively. Equally significant, collaboration and teamwork abilities facilitate their group projects and enhance their learning through sharing knowledge and information.

Students also know that soft skills are a real concern for employers nowadays, and that being competent in them can significantly boost their profiles. They recognize that many employers are looking for candidates with effective communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities, as shown in Figure 5 below. For these students, developing such promising skills during their education can give them a competitive advantage in the job market. In addition, engineering and science education often involves project work and internship responsibility. As a result, students perceive some power skills like time management, organization, and project planning to be particularly helpful in the successful completion of such educationally and professionally demanding tasks. Effective communication and presentation skills are similarly beneficial to them to present their oral reports or projects to professors, peers, or other audiences. Based on our classroom experience, Moroccan university engineering and science students obviously understand the paramount contribution of these skills to their education.

Interestingly, although Moroccan universities tend to provide more academic knowledge and technical abilities in various fields of study, the integration of soft skills in the curriculum is on the rise across institutions and in specific departments. As many engineering and science students pointed out, Moroccan universities are incorporating soft skills development programs into their educational practices. In this way, they present a series of courses and various extracurricular activities aimed at developing students' interpersonal skills. They are driven by a national and international market need for graduates who are well equipped with these 21st century interpersonal skills. In addition, certain university departments and faculties actually emphasize the intense importance of power skills and incorporate them into their programs. For example, engineering and business institutions such as the National Higher School of Arts and Crafts (ENSAM), the Higher School of Technical Education (ENSET), the Mohammadia School of Engineers (EMI), the National School of Business and Management (ENCG) and the Hassania School of Public Works (EHTP) always offer modules on communication, leadership, negotiation, presentation and entrepreneurial skills in foreign languages, mainly in French and English.

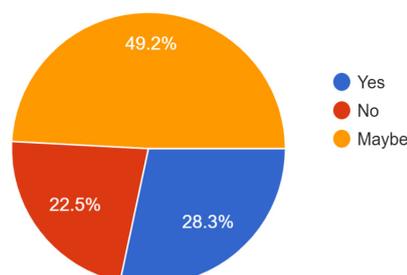


Fig. 5. Can students find jobs with hard skills only?

From another side, students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills, as opposed to hard skills, were found to be sufficiently clear. Most of them consider soft skills to be essential for their current educational path and future career. As shown in Figure 6 below, more than 90% of them believe that these skills are important. They give priority to communication as a fundamental employability skill. They also agree that self-confidence is crucial, followed by teamwork, problem solving, time management, adaptability, listening skills, emotional intelligence, and critical thinking. Nearly all admitted that they enjoy learning soft skills. As they progress through the academic journey of higher education, they often develop a greater appreciation for these skills. This appreciation grows as they join clubs and participate in class discussions, deliver presentations, and do extracurricular activities. All of these can considerably foster their understanding of how soft skills contribute to personal and professional growth.

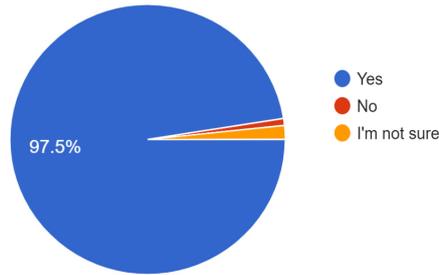


Fig. 6. Do you think soft skills are important?

In addition, many students seem to place more emphasis on the acquisition of hard skills in the early stages of their education. This tendency is triggered by a preliminary desire to cope with the learning difficulty of these competencies in various fields of study, such as mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, and computer science. Many of them are aware that hard knowledge is necessary to perform technically specific tasks. This is why they tend to believe that developing this knowledge is more likely to correlate with academic achievement and later employment success as clarified in Figure 7 below. It shows that more than 28% of students believe that they can find jobs with hard skills only, 28.3% say the opposite, whereas 49.2% are not sure about their real opinions. However, they quickly realize, particularly through internships and classroom work projects, that soft skills are indispensable not only for finding jobs, but also for interacting, collaborating, and communicating effectively in and out of the classroom. As they approach graduation, they discover that employers are looking for candidates who possess a blend of technical knowledge and strong interpersonal skills. Therefore, most of their perceptions change as they mature academically, because if technical expertise is valuable for them, the ability to communicate and work with colleagues and adapt to different scenarios is also essential.

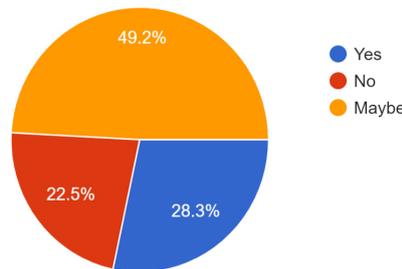


Fig. 7. Can students find jobs if they are good at hard skills only?

Along with classes on communication and soft skills, students gain a first-hand understanding of the importance of these abilities in the workplace through internships and in their institutions through clubs. Their perceptions and priorities can be significantly influenced by this understanding. However, this mindset does not apply to all students; there are others (28.3 % of the students-respondents) who do not prioritize soft skills, as they presume that technical knowledge is always more valued by employers. Yet, this category of students is a minority if compared to the majority who do understand the value granted to employability skills in the job market.

By the same token, employers and students share the same views on the role of soft skills in the job market. The results show that most recruiters believe that soft skills are essential in companies, and almost all students believe that these skills are crucial for them as learners and future job candidates. Moreover, both sides seem to agree on the most needed and required soft skills that can help graduates find jobs and enable them to advance in their careers. These skills are (a) communicating with colleagues, supervisors and partners, (b) demonstrating confidence and motivation in dealing with people and managing opportunities, (c) demonstrating adaptability in different work environments, (d) expressing strong emotional intelligence in building relationships, resolving conflicts and improving job satisfaction, (e) speaking foreign languages (especially English) for career development opportunities, and so on.

It is noteworthy to say that after many decades of French language dominance as the main channel of communication in higher education and business, English has become a strong competitor. It has been observed that both groups of participants attach paramount importance to the English language. Students are now more aware of the fact that without English, they will unlikely succeed neither educationally nor professionally. Most of them know that French is losing ground in Morocco, and that they need to develop English proficiency in order to start and succeed in a career. Employers, for their part, insist that students, graduates and job applicants be able to use and communicate clearly in English, alongside French of course, for English is the lingua franca of the global business and economy.

Remarkably, neither students nor employers seem to pay any specific attention to Arabic language proficiency. This is not surprising given the modest status of Arabic in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) courses at universities, and its nearly complete absence from interviews and the work environment of private companies. Even though Arabic is considered the first language in Morocco, its status in practice is limited to certain fields and sectors that use Arabic as the main source of communication or instruction. These include some media outlets, a few disciplines in the faculties of humanities (history, Arabic, Islamic studies, philosophy, etc.), some classes in secondary and primary education (Arabic, history, and Islamic education), and small public administrations (like municipalities). Due to the underprivileged position of Arabic internationally, students are convinced that it cannot serve their academic aspirations. For their part, employers claim that job applicants who speak Arabic only can by no means meet their industrial and business needs.

CONCLUSION

There seems to be a noticeable difference between the soft skills students possess and the ones employers are looking for. While students are immersed in academic and educational endeavors, they often overlook the critical role that networking can play in building professional connections. As a result, employers expect them to develop and maintain meaningful professional relationships. It is true that many students may not have the opportunity to fulfill such a requirement; this is why it is essential that they be prepared to do so. In addition, while students are expected to have extensive practice and experience in working with diverse teams and managing various interpersonal situations in the workplace, the reality shows that they still need to work hard to learn how to deal with the challenging and unpredictable nature of the professional world. Moreover, the ability to understand and manage their own emotions and empathize with others, along with the ability to apply the critical thinking skills acquired in academic settings to real-life problem-solving issues, and the ability to lead in academic environments are all qualities that many students still lack and are advised to develop.

In Moroccan education and business, soft skills, interpersonal skills, professional skills, or power skills are no longer a fancy or abstract topic to be discussed on webinars or seminars. They have become a practical field that has been promoted in and by all universities, and are seriously considered by many employers. Because these skills are essential components of business success and growth, employers are attributing a higher priority to them in job interviews.

These facts are the direct conclusions we have drawn from this study. We conclude that employers or

recruiters are well aware of the different types of power skills and their importance to employees. This is why they make sure to assess candidates' understanding, practice and self-awareness of soft skills. Many of them refrain from hiring graduates whose interpersonal skills are not convincing. They tend to value candidates with strong soft skills because they contribute to effective teamwork, to proper communication channels with colleagues and clients, and to a dynamic work environment.

Because these power skills are considered necessary for employment, especially in the private sector, many students and future graduates appreciate their necessity. They also recognize how these competencies can help them find jobs and grow personally and academically. This awareness pushes them to make significant individual efforts to improve their understanding and use of such skills. They do so through formal and informal practices such as giving presentations, engaging in discussions and debates, making oral reports, completing projects, and participating in extracurricular events. Through these rewarding activities, they develop, among other competencies, communication, emotional intelligence, teamwork, and problem-solving skills.

Ethical Statement

We hereby confirm that the data was collected and shared with the consent of the subjects (employers and students) who voluntarily participated in the study.

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Declaration of Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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