



SOFT SKILLS TEACHING AND LEARNING IN MOROCCO: A META ANALYSIS

Soukaina Elouaali¹,
Youcef Hdouch²,
Si Mohamed Chana²ⁱ

¹PhD Student,
University Ibn Tofail,
Kenitra, Morocco

²Professor,
University Ibn Tofail,
Kenitra, Morocco

Abstract:

Soft skills have become a debatable topic, and they have become one of the requirements of the workplace, especially in the era of globalization. That is to say, university graduates, for instance, need to master various soft skills before applying for a job such as communication, cooperation, leadership, and problem-solving, to mention a few. Hence, it is important to integrate and incorporate soft skills in the educational curriculum in order to enable the young generation to join the labor market. Regarding the importance of these skills, this meta-analysis is conducted to explore the situation of soft skills teaching and learning in Morocco. It is based on nine studies on soft skills teaching and learning in Morocco. The analysis supports the importance of soft skills' inclusion in the Moroccan curriculum; the analyzed articles highly recommend role-play, problem-solving, task-based learning, and debates as effective teaching techniques for soft skills enhancement.

Keywords: soft skills teaching and learning, employability, Moroccan educational system, higher education, labor market

1. Introduction

It has become obvious that success in the labor market requires certain competencies, attributes, and skills. These attributes are labeled as soft skills of their importance they have received a great focus from all over the globe. Many studies have been recently done on the significance and importance of soft skills because of the new demands of the job

ⁱCorrespondence: email soukaina.elouaali@uit.ac.ma, youcef.hdouch@uit.ac.ma, simohamed.chana@uit.ac.ma

market. Studies also show that soft skills are given a tremendous emphasis since employees must possess some of them. That is to say hard skills as opposed to soft skills, are no longer enough to enter the labor market without being equipped with them. Thus, candidates need to equate between hard skills and soft skills. Moreover, the Moroccan new reform has issued the necessity of soft skills adoption in education; and the new strategic vision (2015-2030) also emphasized the importance of soft skills' incorporation in the Moroccan curriculum. This proves that the inclusion of these skills contributes to the development of learners, teachers, and the country in general.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the situation of soft skills teaching and learning in Morocco by analyzing nine articles on the importance of soft skills' inclusion in the Moroccan curriculum and the most needed soft skills for employability.

The following research paper is divided into four sections. The first section is about some basic definitions and the literature background related to the topic. The second section will be devoted to the explanation and discussion of the importance of soft skills' inclusion in the Moroccan educational curriculum. The third section discusses the fundamental soft skills that should be acquired for employability and the innovative approaches to teaching them. Finally, we are going to provide an overall evaluation of the situation of soft skills teaching and learning in Morocco based on the analysis of nine articles.

2. Soft skills and their importance

Soft skills refer to the personal traits or attributes that enhance an individual's ability to enter the workplace. These skills include communication, creativity, critical thinking, time management, problem-solving, confidence, honesty and integrity, self-motivation, and a positive attitude; to name but a few.

Aziz and Zaidoune (2022) defined soft skills as career or job traits that individuals should have in order to be employable. Besides, Emoutanna and Motti (2022) use the term "*employability skills*" to refer to soft skills. They state that employability skills can be defined as the most important abilities not just to own a job but also to grow inside a company.

Chadil et al. (2022) also defined the term soft skills as "*personal traits or qualities that each of us possesses. They make us who we are, generally encompassing our, attitudes, habits, and the way we interact with others. They refer to the abilities that make people better employees and open doors to many opportunities that are not directly related to the subject of their work*".

Nowadays, soft skills play a major role in creating a positive environment in the workplace. Indeed, hard skills are no longer enough to enter the workplace because without being equipped with soft skills along with hard skills, a person cannot succeed and flourish at work. Aziz and Zaidoune shed light on how important to implement and develop certain soft skills in universities. They state that it is crucial to integrate "*a set of non-academic attributes, such as the ability to cooperate, communicate and solve problems, often referred to as generic or soft skills in higher education*". They add "*unlike academic or disciplinary knowledge, which is subject-based content-specific and formally assessed, soft skills*

comprise a range of competencies that are independent of, albeit often developed by, formal curricula and rarely- assessed explicitly" (Aziz & Zaidoune, 2022). This quote shows the importance of implementing soft skills in the curriculum and the deep need to be taught and adopted along with hard skills. Moreover, Elmoutana and Motti (2022) argued that "since soft skills have a direct impact on a person's wellbeing, capacity for social adjustment, capacity for job scenario adaptation, they must be integrated and discussed at the academic level". This quote also clarifies the significance of developing one's soft skills for a better work environment.

It becomes increasingly evident that without soft skills employees can't perform their tasks successfully as they play a crucial role in one's future professional life. Hence, a great emphasis should be put on the development and incorporation of soft skills in order to support and make things easier for graduates in their future careers.

2.1 Most needed soft skills for employability

Many studies have investigated the most important soft skills that candidates need to possess for employability. Indeed, all soft skills are important and significant in the labor market, but still, some of them are more crucial than others such as problem-solving, communication skills, and creativity; because recruiters give much importance and focus to such skills.

Hasshas and Tamiri (2022) considered some skills as important for individuals' development and success in the Moroccan labor market these include "empathy, correlation, sharing, communication, critical thinking, and negotiation". According to the writers, the most crucial soft skills or non-academic skills are "courage, resilience, Tranquility, disposition for self-change, engagement with the world, and curiosity and willingness to communicate". The authors believe that the mentioned skills will meet the needs and requirements of the work environment. They argue that social skills will facilitate the integration of new graduates into the job market. However, they insist on the impossibility of constructing a specific list of non-academic skills that would satisfy all recruiters.

Still, some skills are regarded as important for employability, and here is a list composed of 10 essential soft skills:

- *Communication: speaking, writing, and listening;*
- *Teamwork and collaboration;*
- *Flexibility: ability to accept change and adapt;*
- *Professional ethics: punctuality, sense of initiative, loyalty, etc.;*
- *The positive attitude: enthusiasm, self-confidence, optimism;*
- *Courtesy: business etiquette, respect;*
- *Integrity: personal values;*
- *Interpersonal skills: sense of humor, kindness;*
- *Professionalism: good appearance, punctuality;*
- *Responsibility: self-disciplined, serious, reliable, responsible." (Hashass & Tamiri, 2022, p. 224)*

Chadil et al. (2022) discussed the results obtained from a survey of university students where students were asked to rank soft skills in terms of importance, and the results showed that teamwork, communication, time management, work ethics, self-confidence, collaboration, and stress management are the most significant soft skills; however, customer/user orientation, cultural adaptation skills, social, being committed to work results orientation, analytical skills, and learning skills were ranked as the least important.

Aziz and Zaidoune (2022) addressed the most essential soft skills that should be included in higher education (B.A. and Master's degree programs) such as communication skills, citizenship, leadership, critical thinking skills, creativity, collaborative learning, and stress management. According to them, these skills are important for preparing students for future jobs. Hence, teachers should be aware of the significance of implementing these skills in classrooms.

Taking it a step forward, they discussed the results gained from a questionnaire that was distributed to business educators where they were asked to rank the necessary soft skills. All respondents ranked "*communication, time management, good attitudes, teamwork, self-discipline, presentation, and accountability*" as the most important soft skills that candidates need to possess, whereas "*market research, analysis, marketing, leadership, and customer service*" have received low ratings and less importance.

Ouchen et al. (2022) shared the results obtained from primary school teachers' perceptions of the most important soft skills that should be developed. They found that the essential soft skills for children are intrapersonal skills such as critical thinking, and interpersonal skills like coexistence, tolerance, problem-solving, and learning to learn. The latter skill was ranked as more important than the others from the teachers' perspective. In general, most teachers emphasize the integration of soft skills activities in the classroom.

Mtafi and Tijjini (2022) highlighted the importance of being equipped with certain soft skills in order to succeed in the workplace; they mentioned some essential non-academic soft skills such as empathy, openness to different cultures, open-mindedness, self-awareness, social interaction, motivation, willingness to discover the other, and self-esteem. The authors highlight the significance of the mentioned soft skills for better communication and interaction in the workplace.

The above studies stated the most important soft skills for employability. However, the current analysis shows that certain soft skills are more important than others such as communication, stress, and time management, problem-solving, critical thinking, willingness to discover the other, teamwork, and self-esteem.

3. The integration of soft skills in the Moroccan universities

It has been widely discussed that integrating soft skills into the curriculum of higher education in Morocco is very important; this stems from the importance of soft skills in enabling students to have more opportunities to get accepted by recruiters. Aziz and Zaidoune (2022) stated that professors consider the implementation of soft skills in the

Moroccan curriculum to be very crucial. They found that forty- five out of sixty-eight percent of participants view the incorporation of non-academic skills as extremely essential to enable learners to enter smoothly to the job market, and not a single participant viewed the integration of soft skills as trivial or insignificant.

In the same context, Elmoutana and Motti (2022) noted that there is a huge need to incorporate soft skills development in university curricula to prepare new candidates for their professional careers. They added that it is obvious that candidates who master both soft and hard skills will have more chances to be employable, unlike those who master only one. Hence, higher education should encourage the enhancement of learners' soft skills and university students must receive education that includes both hard skills and soft skills.

Another study that was conducted by Chadil et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of integrating non-academic skills into the university curricula. The researchers asked a group of university students of Ben M'chik and Ain Chok about the appropriate environment and the right person who can help learners acquire and develop their soft skills; the results showed that the majority of students believe that teachers or lecturers are the most adequate people to enhance students' soft skills, likewise, the university is the appropriate place where students can enrich their non-academic skills. Students insist on soft skills' inclusion in the university curricula because of their great importance in the labor market.

4. Effective teaching methods for soft skills development

How to teach soft skills has become a debatable topic since they gained immense popularity in the field of education in general and the workplace in particular. However, there is still ambiguity on how to teach soft skills along with hard skills. Some say that soft skills can be taught implicitly with academic knowledge, and others say that soft skills should be taught explicitly separately (El Bakali, 2020).

El Bakkali (2020) studied the deep link between soft skills and project-based learning. The study focused on the incorporation of soft skills through project-based learning. The researcher believes that project-based learning can improve students' different soft skills such as problem-solving, maintaining positive attitudes, creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, self-management, and decision making along with promoting responsibility. He asserts that project-based learning offers suitable alternatives to professional reality situations that link between learning and doing which in turn will help learners enrich their soft skills needed in the job market.

El Moutana and Motii (2022) shared their views on innovative teaching soft skills methods and approaches. Through their study, they found that project activities and social activities outside the classroom can play a vital role in the enhancement of learners' soft skills. Moreover, role play, reflective practice, and problem-solving strategies can be used as effective and valuable preparation tools to help learners become more qualified in their professional lives.

Chadil et al.'s study (2022) on the most effective teaching methods for developing soft skills revealed that the majority of students believe that training, teamwork, problem-solving, and role-playing are the most appropriate teaching methods to acquire soft skills. Because of their impact on learners' personality development, Aziz and Zaidoune (2022) suggested extracurricular activities as a tool to foster, implicitly, learners' soft skills. They believe that extracurricular activities can help learners broaden their worldviews and job opportunities. Besides, such activities will aid learners in building their self-confidence and motivation. In the same context, they discussed some of the techniques and methods that can be used to develop soft skills in EFL classes. They observed that problem-solving and task-based exercises can boost learners' soft skills as they will be exposed to issues relevant to real situations. Moreover, discussions and debates can be a great source of soft skills enhancement as they will enable learners to practice communication, active listening, and delivering presentations. The latter can also improve teamwork and collaboration which in turn can help learners promote their collaborative skills.

5. General analysis

Nowadays, to be employable one should have a combination of academic knowledge and non-academic one. It becomes evident that soft skills are a necessity to join the labor market because without them candidates can't be successful at any organization. Employers are no longer looking at the knowledge qualifications and the higher grades; they further give great importance to how a candidate communicates, collaborates, and solves problems. They need candidates that are well equipped with the so-called "soft skills". This includes the ability to lead, make the right decisions, negotiate, communicate, manage time, solve complicated situations, and other skills. The latter will not only help learners to succeed and perform well in classrooms but also will enable them to get hired. That's why the new reform called for the integration of soft skills into the Moroccan curriculum. It is also highly recommended to include soft skills in the primary school curriculum.

The question is how soft skills can be taught and learned. Numerous studies suggest some techniques and methods that can be used to transmit them to learners. Role play and problem-solving are two tools that can be used to foster learners' non-academic skills to begin with, role play can help learners foster their communication skills which is very important in the labor market. In other words, learners should be able to communicate their ideas smoothly with others. Problem-solving can expose learners to different difficult situations in which they need to use their wisdom and knowledge to find suitable solutions.

Researchers also suggest discussions and debates as a tool to foster learners' soft skills. Discussions and debates can be an effective way to boost learners' communication, negotiation, knowledge, leadership, and self-confidence as well. Besides, they will enable learners to develop their collaborative work.

The current analysis throws light on the importance of soft skills inclusion in the curriculum to enable learners to be employable. It also shows some of the techniques and

methods that can be used in the classrooms for soft skills development such as role-play, debates and discussions, problem-solving, and task-based learning.

5.1 Limitations

There are limited and very few studies that are done on soft skills teaching and learning in Morocco. Moreover, there aren't detailed and profound activities and techniques on how to teach soft skills and how they can be implemented in classrooms and EFL classes in particular. There are general suggestions that should be taken into consideration, but further studies should be conducted on this field for future development in the case of Moroccan education.

5.2 Discussion

Soft skills play a vital role in learners' success in the job market, that's why it is highly recommended to be integrated into the Moroccan educational system. However, soft skills are not included in the curriculum because of lack of awareness and lack of teachers' training. Certain studies call for an explicit teaching of soft skills and they put much emphasis on certain skills like communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, we cannot deny the fact that all soft skills are important for new graduates to flourish in their future work. The question is how these skills can be transmitted to learners. The above studies suggest some techniques and methods that can help learners improve their soft skills. Role-play, debates, discussions, and task-based learning; such techniques can be effective in learners' soft skills development. The suggested techniques are not explained profoundly step by step. There is a general explanation of how to use the above techniques in the classrooms. Moreover, the above studies focus more on the most needed soft skills in the labor market and give less focus to the teaching of the latter. Besides, all studies shed light on the significance of soft skills' inclusion and development.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Soukaina Elouaali is a high school teacher at Jamei High School, Tangier, Morocco. She has been teaching since 2019. Her research interests are TEFL and soft skills.

Si Mohamed Chana is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English Studies at Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra, Morocco. He has been teacher at CPGE (Classes Préparatoires aux Grandes Ecoles) for 9 years. Si Mohamed Channa was a member of the Moroccan Association of Teachers of English (MATE). His research interests are soft skills, TEFL and ESP.

Youssef Hadouch is a university professor in the Department of English studies at Ibn Tofail university, Kenitra, Morocco. He has been teaching for years.

References

- Ait Bahadou, Z. (2022). *Soft skills of Moroccan University Teachers*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7083455> Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363703066_Soft_skills_of_Moroccan_university_teachers
- Aziz, S., & Zaidoune, S. (2022). Moroccan Higher Education Teachers' Perceptions of the Most Important Soft Skills for Employability. *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 5(10). Retrieved from <https://ijsshr.in/v5i10/Doc/17.pdf>
- Chaibate, H., & Bakkali, S. (2017). Skills for employability: Identification of the Soft Skills required in engineering education. *The Journal of Quality in Education*, 7(9), 12. <https://doi.org/10.37870/joqie.v7i9.5>
- Chadil, K., Radid, M., & Sefri, Y. (2022). Soft skills at the Moroccan university level: Case of the faculty of Sciences Ben M'sik and Faculty of Sciences Ain Chock of Casablanca. *Journal of Human University*. 3(2)
- El Bakkali, A. (2020). The Moroccan Bachelor New Reform: The Incorporation of Soft Skills Through Project-Based Learning. Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Proceedings of 2nd MEC TESOL Conference 2020, pp.4-16. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/MEC2.1>. Retrieved from <https://awej.org/the-moroccan-bachelor-new-reform-the-incorporation-of-soft-skills-through-project-based-learning/>
- Elmoutanna, N., & Motii, N. (2022). Soft skills from university to workplace: A literature review. *International Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management and Economics*, 3(5-1), 187-198. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7121124>
- Hasshas, D., & Tamiri, M. A. (2022). Youth Employability into The Moroccan Labor Market: Soft Skills a Determining Factor. *Revue Internationale Des Sciences De Gestion*, 5(2). Retrieved from <https://revue-isg.com/index.php/home/article/view/980>
- Mtafi, O., & Tijjini, M. (2022). Integration of soft skills in the Universities of Morocco: Focus on intercultural pedagogy. *Revue Internationale Du Chercheur*, 3(3). Retrieved from <https://www.revuechercheur.com/index.php/home/article/view/419>
- Ouchen, L., Tifroute, L., & El Hariri K. (2022). Soft Skills through the Prism of Primary School Teachers. *European journal for educational research*, Volume 11 Issue 4 (October 2022), Pages: 2303-2313. Retrieved from <https://www.eu-jer.com/soft-skills-through-the-prism-of-primary-school-teachers>
- Riahi, S. (2022). Strengthening the Teaching of Soft Skills in the Pedagogical Architecture of Moroccan Universities. *International Journal of Engineering Pedagogy (iJEP)*, 12(4), pp. 47–62. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijep.v12i4.22329>
- Sanhaji, M. (2022). Teaching Soft Skills to Students of Humanities: A Cultural Perspective. *Int J Adv Innovat Thoughts Ideas*, Vol 12(1): 196, Retrieved from <https://www.omicsonline.org/open-access/teaching-soft-skills-to-students-of-humanities-a-cultural-perspective-123477.html>

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).