Student Perception on the Importance of Soft Skills for Education and Career Success

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Abstract

Soft skills are essential for career success and maintaining positive social connections. Employers place high importance on these traits when employing young graduates. The primary purpose of this research is to analyze how university students value soft skills in terms of their academic and professional success. This study followed the survey method. The study population is students of Khulna University, Bangladesh. The survey was completed by 250 students from Khulna University's undergraduate and graduate programs. In this study, all the data are collected through a questionnaire with open-ended and close-ended questions. The majority of respondents agreed that soft skills help one's social life and one's career. However, they did not believe these abilities significantly boosted their social interaction skills. Students ranked teamwork and collaboration, problem-solving, time management, decision-making, and a hunger for knowledge as the top five most important soft skills. This study provides several suggestions for enhancing students' soft skills, which may increase their employability. Respondents were asked how universities could improve students' soft skills. Over 72.4% of students supported adding curriculum-based soft skills development activities. Respondents were then asked to suggest soft skill-building strategies for students. Most respondents advised sending students to professional development classes to improve soft skills. 77.2% also advised students to attend student union-organized soft-skill development events.

Keywords: *Perception; Soft skills; Career; Education; Importance.*

Introduction

In today's competitive and rapidly evolving job market, possessing solely technical knowledge and expertise may not suffice to achieve career success. Employers increasingly value diverse skills, including technical proficiency and strong soft skills. These soft skills encompass effective communication, problem-solving, teamwork,

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and adaptability. They are non-technical, interpersonal abilities that enable individuals to interact effectively in various social and professional contexts. Soft skills are crucial for academic and professional success, as shown by the growing corpus of research on the subject. The importance of soft abilities has been recognized by numerous organizations, most notably the World Economic Forum (WEF), which has highlighted soft skills as crucial for success in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The WEF has emphasized the importance of skills, including emotional intelligence, critical thinking, and creativity, for managing the rapidly changing global economy [1]. Businesses are more likely to hire, retain, and promote people who are dependable, resourceful, ethical, great communicators, self-directed, willing to work hard and learn new things, and have a good outlook. Employers value employees who can bring a variety of abilities to the table, and possessing an adequate level of soft skills is also seen as advantageous for advancing one's career. According to Porter, many students in the business field do not place enough value on honing their "soft skills." This is perhaps why business students have a negative attitude towards and are reluctant to participate in behavioral courses that heavily prioritize the development of soft skills [2]. This information gap results in a common lack of soft skills among newly employed business majors. Schools are increasingly expected to help pupils improve their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Kumara and Sahasranam [3] used a core soft skills inventory test to investigate the extent to which engineering students in India possessed transferable soft skills. They asserted that all students' creative and soft abilities could be honed, molded, and developed through properly planned training programs. Business students can improve their communication skills when writing effective business letters and developing projects based on real firms and scenarios.

Professors and students at several American universities share their views on the value of soft skills in the information systems curriculum. A poll found that students were generally happier than professors emphasizing soft skills instruction. In conclusion, business success relies heavily on soft, solid skills [4]. Relationships with consumers, partners, and other stakeholders can be fostered using "soft skills," like networking and communication. To develop and respond to shifting market conditions, entrepreneurs need a wide range of "soft skills."

Rationale of the Study
Soft talents are character traits that help people relate with others positively and harmoniously, perform well at work, and pursue their professional goals. Soft talents include, among other things, effective communication, problem-solving, teamwork,

adaptability, creativity, leadership, and time management. For several reasons, it is crucial to research the significance of soft skills in both schooling and career success.

Firstly, today's job market is highly competitive, and possessing the correct mix of soft skills can help people stand out. Companies seek people with the required technical skills and those who can interact well with others, communicate clearly, and show leadership potential.

Secondly, the emphasis on academic success and technical competence in the traditional school system devalues the importance of soft skills. Nevertheless, in the real world, we need people who can successfully use their knowledge and skills in a changing context. Soft skills like problem-solving, critical thinking, and adaptability are just a few examples of what are necessary to succeed in the modern workplace.

Thirdly, developing soft skills is essential for career development. Strong soft-skill holders are more likely to advance to leadership roles and succeed. Excellent soft skills can also contribute to more extraordinary career and personal fulfillment. In today's dynamic and competitive work market, research on the value of soft skills for education and career success is essential. Understanding and developing soft skills can strongly impact career development and advancement, increasing job satisfaction and personal fulfillment.

Objectives of the Study

This study's primary objective is to assess Khulna University students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills in their education and careers.

The specific objectives included:

i. To identify students' self-efficiency in terms of skill level.

ii. To identify students' skills that need to be improved.

Research Questions

i. How do university pupils view the importance of soft skills for their education and careers?

ii. What soft skills do university students wish they had developed more during their university years?

Literature Review

Soft skills are non-technical, interpersonal abilities that allow people to communicate effectively in various social and professional settings. As businesses prioritize these skills when recruiting employees, soft skills are becoming more crucial for academic

and job success. This section examines how soft skills facilitate academic and professional success, drawing upon data from different studies and sources. According to Adhvaryu et al. [5], training in soft skills like communication and problem-solving boosts workplace engagement and productivity by 12% and returns 250%, respectively. As they assess and monitor people, organizations should expect significant benefits from soft skills, such as career advancement and promotion. Ninety-four percent of companies chose to promote individuals with soft skills above those with higher levels of education and experience.

One of the fundamental purposes of higher education is to equip students with the knowledge and abilities necessary to enter the workforce [6]. The rising competition in the job market has made graduate employability a top priority for universities. Prospective companies place a high value on graduates' ability to find jobs after they earn their degrees. Developing broad values in the workplace and general abilities should be part of learning responsive to employment needs. Evidence reveals that there has always been a shortage of soft skills. For instance, Tarallo [7] indicated that thirty percent of businesses have trouble filling entry-level positions with candidates with particular soft skills. Skills, both hard and soft, matter in the workplace. Customer service jobs require soft talents, whereas all jobs require hard skills to do the necessary responsibilities. Numerous organizations have expressed grave worries about the growing gap between graduates' abilities and skills and the need to tackle workplace difficulties. One in four organizations believes traditional universities cannot provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the workforce.

Chan found that lack of creativity, critical thinking, social skills, and time management among university graduates. Lack of soft skills poses a severe risk to businesses because self-motivation and personal development are essential to both the workplace and the business. Studies show that workers who practice soft skills through coming to terms with a change in their professional and personal lives are happier than those who do not [8].

Students must become proficient in using soft skills because they are the "language and currency" of the labor market [9]. After all, human connections, the expression of ideas and opinions, and dispute resolution are all part of the job. According to Bauer-Wolf [10], 80% of modern businesses believe university graduates have a large gap between their technical and soft skills. Technological advancements that enable students to learn outside of the traditional classroom and follow their preferred learning styles have caused significant issues for faculty. It could be a positive sign for

faculties if they adopt advanced technology. There appears to be a substantial gap between the requirements of the workplace and our educational system [11].

According to a World Economic Forum (WEF) study, employers in 2020 wanted advanced problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management, and emotional intelligence. Each demonstrates a soft skill necessary for professional success [1]. In a different poll, 93% of employers surveyed agreed that soft skills are either more important or equally significant to technical skills when making hiring selections. Additionally necessary for academic success are soft skills. According to a study by the National Bureau of Economic Research, students who had good social skills and could cooperate with others performed better academically than those who lacked these abilities. Soft skills like collaboration, teamwork, and communication are crucial for group tasks and presentations.

According to research by the Kauffman Foundation [12], entrepreneurs who excelled at soft skills like networking and communication were more likely to find success in their businesses. Entrepreneurs also need soft talents like creativity and flexibility to develop and adapt to shifting market conditions. Soft skills are the most critical indicator of academic success [12]. Hence, universities should prioritize developing them in their faculty and students. Therefore, curriculum designers have been forced to reevaluate how to highlight the significance of cultivating soft skills [13]. The development of such human capital is risky without a carefully planned and well-organized educational system. Higher education institutions play a crucial role in building human capital to meet the demands and expectations of society and the nation by equipping students with the skills they need to succeed in their chosen fields [14]. Naturally occurring and capable of transferring and producing information based on regional needs, the acquisition of soft skills is often taken for granted [15].

Teachers recognize the importance of soft skills in interdisciplinary coursework but do not include them in their lessons. Lecturers must undergo more intensive training and development to impart these abilities to their pupils adequately. Lecturers must first thoroughly understand soft skills before adapting their teaching strategies for the pupils. How organized and effective education becomes a two-way process depends on the teachers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes [16]. Schulz [14] argues that teachers should play a central role in helping students improve their "soft skills." Building this human capital requires an informed and well-planned educational system.

Communication, critical decision-making, interpersonal, negotiation, problem-solving, self-confidence, self-management, teamwork, and moral responsibility are among the top ten soft skills related to work in the business and information technology sectors

[17-18]. One study found that improving prospective employers' soft skills affected college students' exposure to positive social change [17]. According to the study results, most students needed to improve their communication abilities. Students graduating from community colleges are well-prepared for entry-level jobs, but those positions require more than basic abilities. Students were also suggested participating in a professional development training program to hone their soft skills before entering the workforce. Radermacher et al. [19] also showed that fresh grads have difficulty establishing professional relationships with peers and clients. The findings of their study emphasized the importance of teaching students effective methods of communication and issue-solving.

Most of the research on the topic has been done from the perspective of employers, and relatively few have focused on the views and opinions of students. Furthermore, most of this research was conducted in North America and Europe, which have different working and learning environments than many Asian nations. Therefore, studying students' views on soft skills in a novel context is beneficial. To conclude, it is clear that soft skills are crucial to both academic and professional achievement. Employers value Technical and soft skills equally, and academic success correlates with a student's social and emotional intelligence. Those who excel in soft skills tend to advance in their careers, make more money, and like their jobs more. Students and workers alike need to hone their "soft skills" to achieve their full potential.

Conceptual Framework

The Human Capital Theory is an appropriate conceptual framework for studies on the value of soft skills for academic and professional achievement. In the language of social scientists, "human capital" refers to intangible characteristics businesses value. The workforce's expertise, health, and education are all factors. Human capital has a considerable effect on personal revenues. Investments in human capital have been shown to yield high returns during the formative years of adulthood. For instance, corporations may invest in staff training and development initiatives to raise output and quality standards. In the 1960s, economists Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker recognized that increased productivity could result from spending more on education and training. The human capital theory argues that a person's level of wealth can be increased by acquiring skills and knowledge. In a perfect labor market, workers' pay is set by their productivity, so they will be compensated more if they work more efficiently. Until the private returns on investment in education are equivalent to the private costs, people will continue to invest in it. People can boost their productivity, earnings, and job success by investing in their education, training, and human capital

development. Human capital encompasses hard (technical) and soft (social, leadership, problem-solving, and communication) skills. As such, the Human Capital Theory, which highlights the importance of investing in technical and non-technical skills to build one's human capital and increase economic returns, provides a robust theoretical foundation for investigating the role of soft skills in education and employment performance. The human capital theory gained currency through the development of economists such as Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz in the mid-20th century. This theory posits that investments in education, training, and health are analogous to investments in physical capital, such as machinery or infrastructure, and can yield economic returns through increased productivity and higher wages.

Methodology

This quantitative study aims to address a research problem by collecting data through a survey. The data were gathered from students at Khulna University through a questionnaire. The questionnaire predominantly consisted of multiple-choice and rating scale matrix questions to solicit responses. While most of the questions were multiple-choice, respondents could offer comments or provide additional information. Students at Khulna University were approached and invited to participate in the study. Specifically, this study focuses solely on the perceptions of soft skills among undergraduate and graduate students at Khulna University. It is important to note that no opinions from employers or organizations were sought in this study; all findings are based solely on student opinions. The survey method was employed to gather a significant amount of information efficiently. A total of 250 students participated in this study.

Sampling: The survey was conducted with convenience sampling, recruiting easily accessible subjects. Researchers typically enlist individuals in the most accessible locations. Convenience sampling is also referred to as opportunity or availability sampling. Eight Khulna University students were approached verbally and invited to participate in the study. Those students who expressed interest were provided with a copy of the questionnaire. The survey was conducted over two weeks in the second quarter of 2023, during which 250 students participated. The scope of this study is within Khulna University, which has a population of 7,000, thus making the population of this study 7,000 students. A sample of 250 students was selected using convenience sampling.

Study Area: The research focuses on Khulna University of Bangladesh as the area of study, encompassing its eight schools and 29 disciplines. In order to comprehensively address the research objectives, students from all schools and disciplines have been included in the study. Efforts were made to maintain a balanced gender ratio among the participants.

Data Processing and Analysis: The data are computerized and analyzed by using different software like SPSS, MS Word, Excel, etc.

Results and Analysis
Respondents Profile

Gender	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	153	61.2%
Female	97	38.8%

Table 1. Gender ratio

A comparable proportion of individuals from Khulna University participated in this research: This survey included 250 respondents. The analysis of the data is based on 250 fully completed survey forms. Male students comprised 61.2% of the student body, while female students comprised 38.8%.

School-wise Respondents

School	Frequency	Percentage%
Science, Engineering & Technology School	55	22%
Management and Business Administration School	14	5.6%
Life Science School	67	26.8%
Social Science School	44	17.6%
Art & Humanities School	44	17.6%
Fine Arts School	14	5.6%
Law School	5	2%
Education School	7	2.8%

Table 2. School-wise participant

55 (22%) students from schools that teach science, engineering, and technology participated, along with 14 (5.6%) students from the Management & Business Administration School and 67 (26.2%) students from the Life Science School. Besides, 14 (5.6%) from the Fine Arts School, 44 (17.6%) from the Social Science

School, 44 (17.6%) from the Arts & Humanities School, and the Law School 5 (2% of the participants), and 7 (2.8%) kids from the education school also contributed to the study.

Academic Year-wise Respondents

		Frequency	**Percentage%**
Year	First Year	90	36%
	Second Year	36	14.4%
	Third Year	34	13.6%
	Fourth Year	32	12.8%
	Master's	58	23.2%

Table 3. Academic year participant

Regarding the year of study, the largest group of 90 respondents (36%) were in their first year, followed by 58 (23.2%) in their master's, 36 (14.4%) in their second, and 34 (13.6%) in third. Only 32 students, or 12.8%, were in their fourth year.

Awareness of Students about Soft Skills

Ranking	**Frequency ($n = 250$)**
Communication skills	186
Time management	130
Leadership Abilities	122
Teamwork spirit	110
Problem-solving	108
Creative problem solving	105
Strategic thinking	85
Willingness to learn	78
Personal Effectiveness	74
Positive work attitude	72
Passion towards work	71
Negotiation Skills	71
Conflict management	70
Persuasion Skills	44

Table 4. The respondents' perceptions of soft talents (multiple responses)

We questioned the participating students about the skills they felt could be considered soft talents. The test was made to see how well they understood abstract concepts. The

literature analysis led to the identification of 14 core competencies. Less than 30 (12%) of the 250 respondents who selected all the skills said they understood soft skills only partially. The students' top four soft skills were communication, time management, leadership, and a sense of teamwork. Most students did not classify some personality traits as soft skills, including a positive attitude towards work, a drive to learn and be passionate about what they do, the ability to resolve conflicts, and persuasive skills. Other soft skills mentioned by the students but not on the questionnaire included technology skills, hard work, quantitative and qualitative aptitude, technical skills, and interpersonal communication.

Perceived Importance of Soft Skills

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Soft abilities are critical for career advancement	57	82	43	43	25
Employers value soft talents more than ever.	42	114	67	15	12
Soft skills are important for getting a better job	109	106	16	8	11
Soft skills are harder to develop than professional knowledge.	27	64	57	80	22
Soft skills cannot be enhanced through practice	23	48	42	87	50
Professional knowledge is greater than soft skills.	20	28	28	102	72

Table 5. General perceptions about soft skills ($n = 250$)

Several hypotheses were utilized to probe students' overarching views on the significance of soft skills. Most polled students agreed or strongly agreed that developing one's soft skills was crucial to landing a better job, progressing one's career, and being in high demand among employers. Similar to the previous point, 91 people (36.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that soft skills are more challenging to develop than technical abilities. Respondents overwhelmingly disagreed or rejected the claim that soft skills cannot be gained via practice and that such abilities are less significant than professional skills and knowledge. However, most respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the idea that soft skills cannot be improved via

practice and are less valuable than hard talents, which indicates that pupils understand the significance of developing their soft skills.

Significance of Soft Skills

Purpose	n	Mean (1-7)	SD
Soft skills are important for getting along with people	250	5.52	1.75
Soft skills are important for Career Advancement	250	5.88	1.628
Soft skills are important for Finding a job	250	5.78	1.628
Soft skills are important for Academic performance	250	5.56	1.695

Table 6. Significance of soft skills

On a 7-point scale, students were also asked to rank the importance of soft skills for specific objectives. Mean scores for "career progression" (5.88), "getting a job" (5.78), and "academic performance" (5.56), all concerned with soft skills, were the highest. Students, however, ranked these soft abilities somewhat less important than others when communicating with people.

Soft Skills Significance in the Job Market

Soft Skills	N	Mean (1-7)	SD
Leadership	250	5.64	1.796
Teamwork and collaboration	250	5.80	1.757
Decision-making	250	5.78	1.727
Problem-solving	250	5.81	1.736
Time Management	250	5.79	1.737
Passion and optimism	250	5.57	1.721
Critical thinking skills	250	5.65	1.743
Willingness to learn	250	5.66	1.701
Self-motivation and self-direction	250	5.57	1.746
Making presentations	250	5.57	1.778
Small group discussion	250	5.47	1.628
Writing business communications	250	5.51	1.653
Writing proposal	250	5.44	1.625
Writing memoranda	250	5.38	1.546

Table 7. Soft skills' significance in the job market

To solidify students' beliefs in the significance of soft skills, they were presented by weighing the relative worth of 14 talents chosen from previous research. The top five skills were listed as follows: receptivity to learning (5.66 average), problem-solving (5.81 average), time management (5.79 average), decision-making (5.78 average), and cooperation and collaboration (5.80 average). It was a shock to find out that the five least valuable soft talents for finding a job all have to do with communication. The fact that 186 people (or 74.4% of the total) had previously classified it as a soft talent further added to the mystery. Even though they have to fill out applications and go through interviews, many people still do not think having strong communication skills is necessary to get a job.

Importance of Soft Skills in Various Professions

Profession	Mean (1-7)	SD
Directors of Marketing	5.52	1.817
Sales personnel	5.50	1.741
Experts in the Insurance Industry	5.48	1.670
Media and advertising Executives	5.66	1.720
Corporate communications officers	5.65	1.718
Human resource officer	5.67	1.688
Project management executives	5.67	1.721
Financial service consultants	5.60	1.681
Business Administrators	5.66	1.707
Stock Brokers	5.56	1.669
Bank Executives	5.50	1.696
Financial Analysts	5.50	1.720
Auditors	5.49	1.680
Accountants	5.46	1.703

Table 8. Professions that require soft skills

The students ranked the value of soft skills for various careers in the corporate world. Project managers (mean score 5.67), human resources officers (mean score 5.67), media and advertising executives (mean score 5.66), and business administrators (mean score 5.66) were the occupations where students were most in agreement that soft skills were more important than hard skills. However, they said those in administrative support roles such as financial analysts, auditors, accountants, and insurance service consultants required far fewer soft skills. Business professionals in these fields may not interact directly with clients regularly, but they nevertheless require solid and soft skills to carry out their duties successfully inside their firm.

Self-evaluation of Respondents' Level of Soft Skill Possession

Soft Skills	Mean	SD
Learning eagerness	5.36	1.560
Cooperative effort and teamwork	5.34	1.599
Time management	5.29	1.536
Passion and optimism	5.29	1.536
Self-direction and motivation	5.38	1.564
Making choices	5.33	1.525
Problem-solving	5.45	1.475
Leadership	5.36	1.575
The ability to think critically	5.45	1.481
Small group discussion	5.48	1.503
Writing proposal	5.29	1.583
Making presentation	5.47	1.583
The Art of Business Writing	5.26	1.633
Making notes	5.11	1.651

Table 9. Self-evaluation of respondents' level of soft skill possession

The students identified the top six soft skills as small-group discussions (mean score 5.48), presentations (mean score 5.47), problem-solving (mean score 5.45), critical thinking (mean score 5.45), self-motivation and self-direction (mean score 5.38), and a willingness to learn (mean score 5.36). As with the top four skills, the bottom four were all communication-related, showing that students felt their communication skills were lacking.

Desire to Improve Soft Skills

Ranking	Frequency ($n = 250$)
The ability to communicate	183
Abilities in leadership	165
Efficient Use of Time	134
Problem-solving	126
Coming up with creative solutions	118
Teamwork spirit	105

Conflict management	98
Strategic	93
Negotiation skills	92
Personal Effectiveness	92
Positive work	86
Passion towards work	85
Persuasion skill	82
Willingness to learn	80

Table 10. Soft skills needing improvement (multiple responses)

The respondents were prompted to indicate which soft skills they thought they could use for improvement. Students must want to improve their communication and leadership skills (73.2% and 66.6%, respectively). These abilities were previously chosen as the top three soft skills. It was intriguing that these abilities ranked lowest when separated into more specialized communication abilities. Several pupils seemed to have misconceptions regarding the range of various communication abilities. Problem-solving 126 (50.4%) and creative problem-solving 118 (47.2%) were the two soft talents students wished to enhance. The four soft skills of a positive work attitude, enthusiasm for work, persuasion abilities, and desire to learn were those that only 34% or fewer students aspired to improve. This may have been because only a few students considered these capabilities soft skills.

Obstacles to Learning and Using Soft Skills

Ranking	Frequency
Nervousness	162
Lack of confidence	149
Lack of proper training	129
Shyness	126
Insufficiency of language	109
Not knowing enough	107
Depressing atmosphere	106
Cultural differences	58

Table 11. Obstacles ($n = 250$)

Students who took part in this study were questioned about the challenges they faced in learning and using various communication skills, as many prior studies suggest that most students lack adequate communication skills. According to the pupils, the top four impediments were: nervousness 162 (64.8%), lack of confidence 149 (59.6%), inadequate training 129 (51.6%), and shyness 126 (50.4%). Differences in culture and depressing atmosphere did not seem to be the main obstacles to communication. It was likely that the pupils' communication abilities would develop with appropriate instruction and practice chances.

Academic Initiatives to Build Soft Skills

Opportunities Provided by Universities	Frequency(n=250)
Typically, soft skills were integrated into several academic curricula	192
Taken certain credit-bearing courses that emphasized acquiring particular soft skills	120

Table 12. Opportunities provided by the university

The students were questioned regarding the routes and chances offered by their universities for acquiring soft skills. A total of 192 students, or 76.8%, claimed that soft skills were typically incorporated into various academic curricula. 120 more students (or 48%) disclosed that they had completed credit-bearing courses to enhance particular soft skills.

Participation in Soft Skills Development Programs

Programs/Activities	Never %	Rarely%	Often%
Workshop/Guest talk	18	35.6	46.4
Job hunting skills	30.4	34.4	35.2
Company orientation sessions	36	35.2	28.8
Career advising session	16.8	38.8	44.4
Students coffee sessions	16	40.8	43.2

Table 13. Participation in soft skills development programs ($n = 250$)

The universities of the students who took part in the study offered various chances to develop their soft skills, including incorporating such instruction into specific professional courses and offering specialized soft skills development credit courses.

The type of soft skill development programs that the students attend were questioned. About 46.4% of respondents said they frequently attend seminars or guest speeches, 44.4% said they attend career counseling sessions, and 43.2% attended student coffee meetings. Of the students surveyed, 40.8% reported rarely attending student coffee gatherings.

Except for 'the workshop/guest talk, less than 45% of students reported participating often in other programs, while the vast majority reported rarely participating in programs that could aid in developing students' soft skills. Students relied primarily on academic and credit courses designed to improve specific skills.

Advantages of Soft Skills Training Program

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA
Allowed participants to gain practical experience	8	18	40	131	53
Allowed me to develop my interpersonal abilities	9	19	29	130	63
Adapted soft skills to many scenarios	3	14	43	133	57
The information presented here is not particularly useful for enhancing soft skills	13	54	69	76	38
Content is hard to apply to practice	12	62	62	81	33
Only in theory showed how useful soft skills are	14	49	65	85	37

Table 14. Advantages of soft skills training program

Additionally, a series of statements were utilized to gauge how students felt about the potential advantages of various school-based initiatives for enhancing their soft skills. Both the advantages and disadvantages of these programs were discussed in these statements. More than 76% of students agreed or strongly agreed that soft skills programs allowed them to get practical experience, increased their ability levels, and showed them how to apply soft skills in various circumstances. Split replies were returned for two items, indicating that the information in these soft skills programs was less pertinent and challenging to implement. A more significant percentage of respondents supported the statement that these programs were purely theoretical. In other words, they thought the abilities taught in these programs were not applicable.

Suggestions for Improving Student's Ability of Soft Skills

Suggestions for Action	Frequency ($n = 250$)
Increase soft skills development in the curriculum.	181
Increase internships.	173
Hold additional workshops.	167
Plan additional hands-on activities	142
Organize more company orientation speeches	113

Table 15. Measures that institutions should take to develop soft talents

The respondents were asked to recommend actions universities should take to help their students' soft skills. According to over 181 students (72.4%), more curriculum-based soft skills development activities should be included. Around 173 students (69.2%) suggested adding additional internship programs, and 167 (66.8%) suggested adding more workshops. Once more, most students preferred incorporating these talents into the proper professional courses rather than attending specialized soft skill development programs. According to 3 (1.2%) students, every discipline's syllabus should contain a "Business Communication" course to allow students to practice their soft skills. One example is allowing students to volunteer in NGOs, INGOs, or other settings. Another would be to hold more challenging exams focused on soft skills.

Students should Strengthen their Soft Skills and Ability

Suggested Measures	Frequency
Attend professional training workshops	198
Take part in events hosted by student groups.	193
Study soft skills-related books and publications.	144
Join clubs that offer opportunities to build soft skills	136

Table 16. Students must take steps to strengthen their soft skills and ability

The respondents were then asked what they thought students should do to improve their soft skills. The vast majority of survey takers, 198 (79.2%), agreed that students should participate in seminars/workshops designed to improve their soft skills. In addition, 193 people, or 77.2%, said that students should take advantage of union-sponsored activities to strengthen their soft skills.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not university students had a comprehensive understanding of various soft skills. The students named communication, time management, leadership, and group spirit as the top four soft skills they possessed. It was established that students usually regarded the worth of soft skills using a set of statements. This study shows that possessing soft skills is vital for securing a better job, advancing one's career, and being in high demand by employers. This was the sentiment expressed by students who rated the statement as either true or strongly true. On the other hand, the vast majority of people who participated in the survey either disputed or strongly disagreed with the assertion that "soft skills" cannot be improved via training and that these characteristics are not as significant as specific knowledge and abilities. This suggests that students are aware of the significance and utility of possessing soft skills. Students were asked to assess the relative relevance of 14 skills obtained from prior studies to improve their convictions about the importance of soft skills. The collection of skills was drawn from past studies. The top five talents were a desire to learn, problem-solving, time management, teamwork, and collaboration. The finding raised concerns that five soft skills related to communication were considered the least significant for job searching. It was especially puzzling given that the most significant proportion of respondents, 186, or 74.4%, had earlier categorized it as a soft talent. This implies that people do not consider communication-related abilities essential for landing a job, even though they are categorized as soft skills, require applicants to prepare for interviews, and are required to attend these.

The students were asked about the value of soft skills for various business-related vocations. Students believed soft skills were crucial for project managers, human resources officers, media and advertising executives, and business administrators, where business professionals frequently interact with customers and other stakeholders. The pupils were polled about their confidence in their soft skill competence. Students identified six soft skills as the most important: participation in small group discussions, public speaking, problem-solving, critical thinking, initiative, and a desire to learn. Respondents were asked to rank themselves on a variety of "soft skills" or interpersonal abilities. The top three soft skills students wished to develop were leadership, time management, and communication. These abilities were previously chosen as the top three soft skills. It was intriguing that these abilities ranked lowest when separated into more specialized communication abilities. Several pupils seemed to have misconceptions regarding the range of various communication abilities. Students who took part in this study were questioned about the obstacles they

had in acquiring and using various communication skills, as many earlier studies suggest that the majority of students lack adequate communication skills. The students mentioned unease, lack of confidence, poor training, and shyness as the top four hurdles. The students were questioned regarding the routes and chances offered by their universities for acquiring soft skills. Approximately 76.8% of the students said that soft skills were frequently included in various academic courses. Another 48% of the students recalled taking credit-bearing courses that emphasized acquiring particular soft skills. What kinds of soft skill development programs the students attend were questioned? About 46.4% of respondents said they frequently attend seminars or guest speeches, 44.4% said they attend career counseling sessions, and 43.2% attended student coffee meetings. Of the students surveyed, 40.8% reported rarely attending student coffee gatherings. Less than 45% of the students frequently engaged in other programs, except "the workshop/guest talk." Most students' rarely' participated in soft skill development activities. It indicated that students relied mostly on academic courses, credit courses, and soft skills development programs to strengthen their talents.

Several statements assessed students' opinions on school-based soft skill efforts. These statements discussed these programs' pros and cons. More than 76% of students agreed or strongly agreed that soft skills programs gave them practical experience, strengthened their abilities, and showed them how to apply soft skills in different settings. Respondents were asked how universities could improve students' soft skills. Over 72.4% of students supported adding curriculum-based soft skills development activities. Respondents were then asked to suggest soft skill-building strategies for students. Most respondents advised sending students to professional development classes to improve soft skills. 77.2% also advised students to attend student union-organized soft skill development events.

Conclusions

This study evaluated students' perspectives regarding the significance of soft skills for higher education and the workplace. According to the findings, most students at Khulna University recognized the significance of possessing solid and soft skills when applying for jobs and advancing in their careers. However, many of the students had the impression that their actual level of soft skills did not meet the requirements. In addition, it was found that students did not place a high value on communication abilities, which is most likely why they did not try to strengthen those skills. It was problematic for several reasons, one of which was that several studies that looked at the competencies expected by potential employers found that proficiency in

communication was one of the most sought-after soft skills. Consequently, it is essential to broaden the student's understanding of the significance of communication skills for the development of their careers, as well as the methods for cultivating and improving such talents.

Most students said that non-academic/soft skills were routinely included in various academic subjects/courses, and some students had participated in academically-accredited programs geared towards improving specific soft skills. This was another significant conclusion. This approach is chosen because it would allow pupils to understand how to use these skills in a particular circumstance. Additionally, they might feel too overwhelmed by their professional homework, discouraging them from participating in the university's specialized soft skill development programs. Therefore, the curricula of all the schools at Khulna University should be carefully examined and updated to reflect the necessary soft skills. University administrators should continue offering targeted training programs to refine students' soft skills. Likewise, students must actively engage in self-directed study and participate in relevant extracurricular activities to elevate their level of competence.

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