



BRIDGING THE EMPLOYABILITY GAP: THE IMPACT OF SOFT SKILLS ON UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' WORK READINESS

Dr. Saima Iqbal

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari
Karachi, Pakistan.

saima.mehmood@bbsul.edu.pk

Talib Hussain Qureshi

Lecturer, Government City college Hyderabad, College Education Department Government of
Sindh

Hussaintalib648@gmail.com

Suman shabbir

M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Education, Benazir Bhutto Shaheed University Lyari
Karachi, Pakistan. Scholar,

sumanshabbir08@gmail.com

Abstract

The present study investigated the effect of soft skills on work readiness of undergraduate students studying in the public universities of Karachi. The study concentrated on the major soft skills such as communication, emotional intelligence, team work, time management and leadership that were found to be important in relation to the students' readiness for work and their performance at work. The quantitative descriptive survey design was used and data was collected from 250 undergraduate students using a five-point Likert scale structured questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.792$) confirmed the instrument's reliability, which has good internal consistency. Descriptive statistics and independent-sample t-tests were used for the analysis of the data. The results showed that there was a strong positive correlation between soft skills and work readiness ($t = 6.532, p < .05$). In addition, communication, emotional intelligence, teamwork, time management and leadership were significant predictors of students' work readiness ($t = 5.647, p < .05$). The effect of soft skills also was significant on the job performance as perceived by employers ($t = 5.738, p < .05$). The study findings indicate that integrating the implementation of soft skill development in higher education curricula is very important in improving graduates' employability and successful transition to the working world.

Keywords: *Soft Skills, Work Readiness, Employability, Communication Skills, Emotional Intelligence, Teamwork, Leadership, Higher Education.*

Background of Study

Due to shifting educational trends, flexible course offerings, and an increasing number of competent applicants, the rivalry for job placements and long-term employment opportunities is getting more challenging. In the current labor market, where organizations are downsizing and reducing their workforce, it has become apparent that having professional qualifications alone cannot ensure employability. Studies have found that hard skills, which graduates are supposed to acquire, are overemphasized, whereas soft skills receive insufficient focus in training and education (Noah & Aziz, 2020)

The university graduates in Afghanistan have led to a difficult job market, where making it challenging to secure employment that offers appropriate income and working conditions. The employability of graduates has raised concerns among researchers, educators, employers, and various stakeholders who are interested in the ways higher education institutions (HEIs) equip students for the job market (Tan et al., 2021).

According to research, programs that integrate the development of soft skills, like internships, enhance students' readiness for the workforce by bringing academic performance into line with industry norms (Ingsih & Suhana, 2023). Numerous studies have shown that soft skills have a major impact on undergraduate students' readiness for the workforce. Employers highlight that

when recruiting recent graduates, soft skills like problem-solving, collaboration, and clear communication hold equal importance to technical proficiency (Cheang & Yamashita, 2023). 85% of people who took soft skills training reported better communication, empathy, and problem-solving skills, especially from programs like the Merdeka Belajar kampus Merdeka (MBKM) (Kuncoro et al., 2023). Researcher shows that skills like creativity and teamwork have a direct positive effect on work readiness (Ingsih & Suhana 2023). Combining internships with soft skills training greatly students' readiness for the job market, showing the importance of hands-on experience along with classroom learning (Pambajeng et al., 2024).

Programs that include training in self-efficacy training and organizing activities also help students to get more prepared for work (Rahmadani & Mardalis, 2022). Although the emphasis on soft skills is crucial there are those who argue that academic knowledge and technical abilities remain equally important for overall employment. The challenge of getting a work in the Society emphasizes the integration of human soft skills with progressed innovation such as AI in addressing social problems in both virtual and real environments (Warastri, 2023). These changes make a competitive scene where graduates must be innovative, creative, and have a blend of soft and hard skills to utilize information technology effectively. Therefore, the goal of Indonesia's education reform is to increase worker competitiveness by incorporating theoretical knowledge and practical skills into vocational training (Indrawati & Kuncoro, 2021). The transformation, set to take place from 2019 to 2024, aims to enhance global economic and industrial competitiveness by aligning educational accomplishments with national goals (Indrawati & Kuncoro, 2021).

Introduction of Study

Soft skills, often referred to as interpersonal social, or people skills, are non-technical qualities that relate to how individuals communicate, collaborate, and handle different situations effectively. These skills are primarily linked to an individual's personality, behavior, and emotional intelligence. They represent lifelong learning abilities that are not always cultivated in formal classroom settings but are often enhanced through informal experiences and interactions (Fakhretdinova et al., 2021).

This implies that students hold a responsibility in enhancing their own soft skills. They spend several years in higher education with the expectation that their academic experience will yield positive outcomes by equipping them to secure employment and effectively apply their knowledge and abilities (Fleith et al., 2020). The 2021–22 State of the Workplace report by Management (SHRM), state that 77% of HR professionals emphasized that enhancing employees' soft skills is crucial for their organizations' future success. Employers prefer those candidates who demonstrate practical abilities and interpersonal competencies that extend beyond theoretical or textbook knowledge

Employers tend to hire well-educated and articulate candidates for their organizations. According to a study, communication skills are positively associated with higher academic performance in major subjects and enable graduates to secure employment in their respective fields within one to six months after graduation (T. Rizaldo, 2020). Several critical factors significantly influence an individual's overall work readiness, such as Firstly, personal characteristics encompass skills, abilities, knowledge, self-direction, adaptability, and flexibility. Secondly, organizational skills encompass ethics or workplace professionalism, social responsibility, global awareness, adaptability, and a commitment to lifelong learning. Thirdly, work competencies comprise critical thinking, organizational abilities, creativity or innovation, and problem-solving skills. Finally, social intelligence is defined as the capacity to

collaborate effectively in teams, adapt to diverse situations, and exhibit strong interpersonal and communication skills (Aprilita & Pritasari, 2024).

Graduates, especially new graduates, lack needed skills, specifically crucial soft skills that are required for employability, such as interpersonal skills, leadership skills, and self-management, as well as critical thinking, collaboration, and the ability to solve problems and exhibit creativity (Mofleh 2023; Hashemi, 2020). Universities continue to focus on cultivating students' soft skills to ensure that their graduates are well-prepared and competitive in the workforce (Afif & Arifin, 2022; Ayaturrahman & Rahayu, 2023). The importance of soft skills and self-efficacy in workforce entry can serve as preparatory guidance for final-year students, helping them enhance their work readiness and successfully transition into employment after earning their bachelor's degree (Azizah et al., 2021).

In order to accomplish their professional objectives, students should acquire soft skills (Alt, Naamati et al., 2023). Soft skills, for instance, improve students' communication with peers and instructors, preparing them for successful interactions in the workplace after graduation. Other essential skills that should be taught in higher education include learning how to prioritize tasks, manage time, and develop critical thinking abilities.

Research objective

1. To find the Impact of soft skills on undergraduate students work readiness in higher education public universities of Karachi.
2. To identify the specific soft skills that improve the work readiness of undergraduate students.
3. To assess the influence of soft skills on employees' job performance in the workplace.

Research questions

1. What is the impact of soft skills on the work readiness of undergraduate students in public higher education universities of Karachi?
2. Which specific soft skills enhance the work readiness of undergraduate students?
3. What is the impact of soft skills on employees' job performance in the workplace?

Hypotheses

H₁: Soft skills have a significant positive impact on the work readiness of undergraduate students in public higher education universities of Karachi.

H₂: Specific soft skills such as communication, emotional intelligence, time management, teamwork, and problem-solving significantly enhance the work readiness of undergraduate students.

H₃: Soft skills have a significant impact on employees' job performance in the workplace.

Literature Review

Skills

A skill is the capability to execute a specific action or function with effectiveness and efficiency and it is usually obtained by education, experience, and regular practice (Robbins & Judge 2022). Skills are generally divided into two main types, hard skills and soft skills. You need both knowledge and abilities to be successful at work. Research indicates that possessing both hard and soft skills can significantly impact your job performance and professional success (Lyu & Liu, 2021).

A hard skill denotes a quantifiable and observable ability possessed by an individual for a specific task (Lyu & Liu, 2021). Hard skills are gained through learning and training, equipping individuals to carry out tasks with efficiency and produce high-quality outcome as noted by (Puspita Sari et al. 2022) The importance of hard skills in human resources is highlighted by

previous research indicating that individual tend to achieve greater success when they possess both hard and soft skills. (Lamri & Lubart, 2023).

Soft Skills are non-technical competencies that refer to personality characteristics. Ilmadi (2023) according to (Lubis 2022) Soft Skills are a collection of a person's character, social attractiveness, communication skills, personal habits, self-confidence, concern for themselves and others.

(Cucu Sutianah 2022) asserts that soft skills are an essential component of success. These abilities include a wide range of topics, including human literacy, ethics, norms, etiquette, religious and moral education, character and cultural values, attitude and personality development, and more. Collaboration, teamwork, leadership, management, career development, emotional intelligence, social interaction, communication, teamwork, decision-making, problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, and innovation are all included in this list of vital interpersonal and professional skills. In essence soft skills encompass a wide range of life abilities that allow people to communicate successfully through public speaking, social interaction, and other interpersonal competencies, whether individually, in groups, or in society.

Soft skills are classified into two primary categories: intrapersonal and interpersonal skills (Cambroner-Alonso 2021). Intrapersonal skills pertain to an individual's internal strengths, which include motivation, adaptability, flexibility, and problem-solving capabilities. While interpersonal skills which include teamwork, emotional intelligence, leadership, communication, and conflict resolution, are the ability to build and maintain connections with other people. Therefore, having soft skills indicates having a well-rounded blend of both interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies.

Furthermore, soft skills represent crucial forms of interpersonal and intrapersonal communication that play a vital role in professional environments. They encompass a broad spectrum of personal attributes and behaviors that enhance effective interaction in both workplace and social contexts. These skills include emotional intelligence, communication, creativity, problem-solving, and teamwork, which fosters collaboration toward shared goals; and stress management, which entails managing one's own stress while supporting others in doing the same (Martins et al., 2020).

Types of soft skills

Soft skills involve a diverse set of interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities that are increasingly vital in both educational and professional contexts. In 2020, the National Association of Colleges and Employers identified 20 key indicators of skills needed; there are five indicators of general soft skills. The indicators mentioned include problem solving, teamwork, emotional intelligence, communication skills, and leadership (Ariasepta, 2022). The following part presents the key types of soft skills highlighted in the literature.

Communication Skills

Communication skills refer to the capability of engaging effectively with clients, colleagues, employers, and various stakeholders in a business setting. Individuals with strong communication skills typically demonstrate active listening, express themselves clearly, and demonstrate confidence in articulating their ideas. These abilities include different types, such as presentation abilities, written communication, nonverbal signals, and public speaking. A small error in communication can result in unintended consequences for both the employee and the organization. Therefore, it is crucial to reflect on the purpose and importance of every word, whether it is spoken or written. The capacity to communicate information clearly and



efficiently—both verbally and in written form is vital for effective teamwork, collaboration, and leadership (Kaushik & Sharma, 2023; Pandey & Shukla, 2020).

Emotional Intelligence

Understanding one's emotions and their influence on others is essential for emotional intelligence. This encompasses self-awareness, empathy, and the capacity to regulate one's emotions, thereby improving interpersonal relationships (Kaushik & Sharma, 2023) (Cherusheva, 2023).

Teamwork and Collaboration

Understanding one's emotions and their influence on others is essential for emotional intelligence. This encompasses self-awareness, empathy, and the capacity to regulate one's emotions, thereby improving interpersonal relationships (Kaushik & Sharma, 2023) (Cherusheva, 2023).

Problem-Solving Skills

Problem solving involves the identification of problems and the formulation and evaluation of alternative solutions by weighing risks and benefits. The capacity to analyze situations and devise effective solutions is increasingly sought after in various fields (Kumar et al., 2022) (Pandey & Shukla, 2020).

Leadership skills:

Leadership skills reflect a candidate's ability to lead a team, make decisions, take responsibility, and prioritize the well-being of both the team and the organization. Employers seek this skill when hiring for positions ranging from entry-level to executive roles. A candidate who readily accepts responsibility demonstrates this capability. An exceptional characteristic of an effective leader is their ability to work collaboratively within a team. Leadership encompasses various aspects such as conflict management, decision-making, and team management. (Gebur, 2023).

Work Readiness:

Work readiness refers to the level of competence and expertise an individual must have to perform effectively in a professional environment. It includes a variety of skills that are crucial for success in the workplace. (Akbar et al., 2021).

An individual's preparedness for employment is influenced by their capacity to adapt successfully to the cultural and professional expectations of the workplace. Additionally, work readiness can be characterized as t The degree to which an individual possesses the necessary mindset, skills, and knowledge to succeed in their profession (USAID, 2020) Currently, work readiness programs are designed to close the gap between work-focused learning and the critical skills needed to obtain employment. (Harry & Chinyamurindi, 2022).

Aspects of work readiness

Work readiness consists of four essential components (Sartika & Nengsi, 2022). The first component is individual attributes, which encompass resilience, adaptability, and self-improvement. The second component, organizational insight, pertains to comprehending workplace culture, professionalism, ethics, and social responsibility (Lau et al., 2020). The third component, work proficiency, signifies technical skills, motivation, critical thinking, and creativity. The final component, social intelligence, includes teamwork, collaboration, interpersonal relationships, and communication (Rios et al., 2020; Kolmos et al., 2020).

Employer Expectations

Employers consistently express their preference for employees who exhibit strong soft skills. A 2023 survey conducted by the Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC) revealed that more than 70% of employers indicated that soft skills, especially communication,

collaboration, and leadership, are the most critical qualities sought when recruiting new graduates (GMAC, 2023). Furthermore, the same research emphasized that while many employers are open to providing training in technical skills, they anticipate that candidates will already have robust interpersonal and problem-solving capabilities.

Employment and work readiness

Employment is characterized by the extent to which graduates are viewed as possessing the attitudes and attributes necessary for success in the workplace. Students who are deemed work-ready are recognized for their strong job performance, achievements, and prospects for the purpose of promotion and future career progression (Harry & Chinyamurindi, 2022). In tackling the matter of job preparedness, it is necessary to pay attention to ecosystems such as the context of education, employability, a ready workforce, and a ready workplace (Dudley et al. 2020).

Work readiness is a graduate assessment criterion that indicates that graduates have potential in terms of performance and career advancement. (Indraputri & Zoraifi 2020) Meanwhile, according to Handayani 2022, work readiness is a condition of a person to achieve and carry out an activity that is carried out using energy in an effort to complete or do something to get a salary. It can be synthesized that work readiness is a situation that shows a person is ready to face the world of work with the abilities, skills, and knowledge possessed by harmony and maturity, both physically and mentally and in experience.

Impact of soft skills

The impact of soft skills is profound across various sectors, significantly influencing employee behavior, employability, adaptability, and overall productivity. Studies show that training in soft skills improves communication, collaboration, and leadership capabilities, which are crucial in the current dynamic and competitive workplace. Such training not only improves individual performance but also contributes to organizational success, innovation, and employee satisfaction.

Soft skills are essential in influencing employee behavior and fostering positive organizational outcomes. For instance, at Intel Corporation, focused training on soft skills greatly enhanced employee collaboration and communication abilities, resulting in improved conflict resolution, increased teamwork, and a more unified workplace. (Hang et al., 2024). These improvements resulted in higher productivity levels and reduced turnover rates, underscoring the importance of continuous investment in soft skills development (Hang et al., 2024).

In terms of employability and youth development, evidence from Brazil shows that structured soft skills training programs enhance young people's employability by bridging gaps in critical areas such as problem-solving, teamwork, and communication (Cláudia, 2024). Incorporating these competencies into educational programs is highly recommended to better equip students for the workforce, especially in regions experiencing high unemployment (Cláudia, 2024; Islam R et al., 2024). Similarly, in Bangladesh, studies reveal that graduates lacking soft skills often struggle to secure employment, indicating a strong positive correlation between soft skills awareness, practice, and employability (Islam R et al., 2024).

Moreover, soft skills significantly impact mental well-being and overall quality of life, especially for Generation Z and Millennials. These abilities empower young professionals to navigate the complexities of modern workplaces more effectively, fostering resilience, adaptability, and overall well-being (Balbinot et al., 2024). Universities are therefore encouraged to incorporate soft skills training into their programs to enhance students' adaptability, emotional intelligence, and personal development, ultimately facilitating smoother transitions into the workforce (Balbinot et al., 2024).

Finally, adaptability to change has emerged as one of the most valuable competencies in today's rapidly evolving job markets. The ability to respond flexibly, solve problems creatively, and adjust to shifting professional demands is increasingly recognized as vital for student and employee success. (Kuncoro et al.2023) emphasize, soft skills training is indispensable in equipping individuals with the adaptability and problem-solving capacities needed to thrive in modern, fast-changing environments.

Soft Skills in Higher Education

While traditional academic programs have mainly focused on enhancing technical skills, there is an increasing acknowledgment that students must cultivate soft skills to meet the evolving demands of the modern workforce. (Ellis & Bauer, 2020). Many universities are currently addressing this need by integrating soft skills into their academic curricula, although the approaches taken differ significantly. Some academic programs integrate communication, leadership, and teamwork training directly into their curricula, while others depend on extracurricular initiatives or dedicated workshops to develop these competencies. Embedding soft skills within a comprehensive educational framework is crucial to ensure that graduates are well-prepared for professional environments (Bennett et al., 2018)

Experiential learning is also critical in enhancing these abilities. Internships, cooperative education programs, and project-based courses are widely acknowledged as effective means for students to develop teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills (Liu et al. 2022) found that students who participated in internships demonstrated significantly higher levels of these competencies. Likewise, experiential learning initiatives such as service-learning projects and study abroad programs provide practical settings where students can apply and refine their soft skills, leading to improved academic performance and professional readiness (Chung & Ceballos, 2021).

Challenges in Soft Skills Development

Despite the recognition of their importance, there are significant challenges in embedding soft skills development in university curricula. One challenge is the lack of consensus on how to teach and assess soft skills (Wang et al., 2022). Unlike technical subjects, which have objective measures such as exams and quizzes, soft skills require subjective evaluation, often relying on self-reports or peer assessments. Furthermore, many faculties' members lack training in how to teach these skills effectively, leading to inconsistent implementation across disciplines (Canning et al., 2020).

Theoretical background

Emotional intelligence theory:

Emotional intelligence is directly related to several core soft skills, including communication, conflict resolution, teamwork, and leadership. Individuals possessing high emotional intelligence (EI) demonstrate greater proficiency in regulating their emotions, fostering robust relationships, and adjusting to the social dynamics present in the workplace.

Salovey and Mayer first coined the term EI in 1990. A form of social intelligence that encompasses the capacity to understand and evaluate both your own feelings and those of other people as well as to differentiate between them. And use this awareness to manage thoughts and behavior effectively by means of emotional intelligence (EI) (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 185). Emotional intelligence is the skill that involves understanding and managing your own emotions while also recognizing the feelings of others.

In his examination of EI, Bar-On framed EI in relation to personality theory and overall well-being (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). In 1995, Goleman, with his book *Emotional Intelligence*, conceptualized EI within the framework of a theory of performance. Goleman's theory of EI

is directly applied concerning job performance and overall work effectiveness. All three approaches see EI as “the capacity to recognize, understand, and use emotions effectively as a driving force for human energy, information, and influence” (Cooper & Sawaf, 2001, p. XIII). EI is demonstrated or applied through soft skills (Livesey, 2017).

EI Domains The bedrock of soft skills is based on four EI domains: understanding oneself, managing emotions, recognizing others’ feelings, and maintaining relationships (Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, 2021). These domains provided the analytical framework for me to examine soft skill development in academic and employment settings as articulated by the faculty and employers interviewed for this study.

EI and Soft Skill Training According to Cherniss and Goleman (2001), soft skills can be developed, but it takes time, motivation, and organizational support. Furthermore, soft skill training in an educational or workplace setting requires different practices than traditional cognitive instruction. Learning or improving soft skills not only involves appropriating new insights into one’s current understanding or cognitive toolbox but also requires changing habits, such as becoming more attentive when listening or more open when communicating with others. Additionally, because EI is tied to one’s sense of identity, trying to develop soft skills requires dealing with perceptions and motivations that are deeply ingrained in someone (Cherniss et al., 1998). 48 The Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations 2021 developed a set of approaches for designing and supporting emotional learning to support soft skill development.

EI, as described in Daniel Goleman’s theory, has five key components—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—that play a vital role in personal and professional success, particularly in settings where strong interpersonal skills are essential. (Cherry, 2018).

Self-awareness:

The skill to perceive and interpret emotions as well as to feel the impact of one's own behavior, moods, and other people's emotions is known as self-awareness. It involves tracking and observing different emotional reactions.

Self-awareness also entails being conscious of one's own unique strengths and limitations as well as the connection between one's actions and feelings. Learning from social interactions and being open to new ideas and experiences are both associated with self-awareness. (Cherry, 2018)

Self-regulation:

The proper expression of emotion is a component of emotional intelligence. Being adaptable, handling change, and handling conflict are all components of self-regulation. It also means acknowledging and owning one’s actions, being conscious of how one's actions impact other people, and defusing tense or challenging situations. (Cherry, 2018)

Social skills:

The ability to interact skillfully with others defines this EI component. It involves leveraging awareness of one’s own individual emotions along with others’ emotions to facilitate effective daily communication and social interaction (Cherry, 2018).

Empathy:

Empathy refers to the capacity to comprehend the feelings of others. It allows a person to respond in ways that are sensitive to others’ emotional states. This skill also helps individuals recognize the power dynamics affecting social interactions, particularly in professional settings. Understanding the influence of these dynamics on emotions and behavior, as well as detecting when they are at play, is an important part of empathy (Cherry, 2018).



Motivation:

Within EI, motivation is understood as intrinsic motivation—when a person is propelled by internal desires and personal objectives rather than external incentives like rewards or accolades. Those with intrinsic motivation frequently enter a state of “flow” during tasks, demonstrate goal-directed behavior, take initiative, and consistently strive for self-improvement and success (Cherry, 2018).

Methodology

Research Design

This study is quantitative and descriptive in nature. This study used a survey method to gather data for the purpose of reaching in-depth learning regarding the ground realities and challenges of the above-mentioned issues. Quantitative approaches emphasize accuracy in measurements and the use of statistical, mathematical, or numerical approaches to analyze collected data via questionnaires, as well as the manipulation of statistical information that has been acquired by computing techniques. This research focuses on collecting numerical data and providing understanding in a particular event to generalize information across groups of individuals.

Population

The population of the study consist of students from Public Universities of Karachi. A total of 250 respondents, comprising 122 females (48.8%) and 128 males (51.2%), participated in the study. This sample was drawn from the larger population of students enrolled in Public Universities of Karachi

Sampling

The simple random sampling technique based on convenience has been applied in this study. The sample size comprised 250 respondents, and participants were drawn from public universities in Karachi using the simple random sampling method.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using two closed-ended questionnaires designed for public university students, respectively. These questionnaires were based on demographic information of the respondents and measurement scale.

The questionnaire was comprised of two sections. Section I: Particulars of respondents; Section II: Measurement scale. A five-point Likert scale, followed by Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), was used to collect data

Data Collection

Data were obtained using an online survey, which was distributed to the respondents via email and social media platforms. The online survey was chosen to facilitate a high response rate and to ensure the convenience of the respondents. Clear instructions were provided, and the questionnaire was designed to be simple and self-explanatory.

Statistical Procedure

The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Mean, median, and mode were calculated for descriptive analysis, while a t-test was applied to examine the relationship among the variables in inferential analysis. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire, which was assessed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 26.0).

Result

Reliability

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items

.792	5
------	---

A Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.792 is generally considered to be a good reliability coefficient. It suggests a high level of internal consistency among the item in your scale. This indicates that the item in your measure is high correlated with each other, suggestion that they are measuring the same underlying construct. In other words, scale is reliable in measuring the intended concept or construct

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 01

H1: There is a significant relationship between soft skills and work readiness among undergraduate students in higher education public universities of Karachi

Group Statistics

	Gender respondent	of N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Mean	Error
SK	male	128	4.8781	.34159	.03019	
	female	122	4.3377	.86820	.07860	

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
SK	Equal variances assumed	94.492	.000	6.532	248	.000	.54042	.08273	.37748	.70336
	Equal variances not assumed			6.418	156.8	.000	.54042	.08420	.37410	.70674

Table 4.2.1: hypothesis testing T-test result

Description:

T-test analysis was performed to find a significant relationship between soft skills and work readiness among undergraduate students in higher education public universities of Karachi between male and female students with a significance level of 0.05. The results of the t-test analysis are shown in Table 4.2.1. The mean value for male students was 4.8781 and female students was 4.3377. The value of Standard Deviation (SD) for the significant relationship between soft skills and work readiness among undergraduate students for male students was 0.34159 and for female students was 0.86820. The t-value was 6.532 and p-value was 0.000. As the p-value is less than 0.05 (p<0.05) so, the hypothesis that “There is a significant relationship between soft skills and work readiness among undergraduate students in higher education public universities of Karachi” proved accepted. Thus, hypothetically, there is a significant relationship between soft skills and work readiness among undergraduate students in higher education public universities of Karachi.

Hypothesis 02

H2: Communication, emotional intelligence, team work, time management and leadership skill significantly predict work readiness

Group Statistics

	Gender respondent	of N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Error
Wrp	male	128	4.8688	.38100	.03368	
	female	122	4.4148	.82168	.07439	

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Wrp	Equal variances assumed	73.441	.000	5.647	248	.000	.45400	.08040	.29565	.61234
	Equal variances not assumed			5.560	168.914	.000	.45400	.08166	.29279	.61520

Table 4.2.2: hypothesis testing T-test result

Description:

T-test analysis was performed to find a Communication, emotional intelligence, team work, time management and leadership skill significantly predict work readiness with a significance level of 0.05. The results of the t-test analysis are shown in Table 4.2.2. The mean value for male students was 4.8688 and female students was 4.4148. The value of Standard Deviation (SD) for the significant skill such as Communication, emotional intelligence, team work, time management and leadership skill significantly predict work readiness for male students was 0.38100 and for female students was 0.82168 The t-value was 5.647 and p-value was 0.000 As the p-value is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) so, the hypothesis that “Communication, emotional intelligence, team work, time management and leadership skill significantly predict work readiness ” proved accepted. Thus, hypothetically, Communication, emotional intelligence, team work, time management and leadership skill significantly predict work readiness

Hypothesis 03

H5: Soft skills have a significant impact on employer job performance, resulting in a difference in work readiness

Group Statistics

	Gender respondent	of N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Error
--	-------------------	------	------	----------------	-----------------	-------



Wr	male	128	4.6531	.48828	.04316
	female	122	4.1820	.78288	.07088

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Wr	Equal variances assumed	36.770	.000	5.738	248	.000	.47116	.08211	.30944	.63288
	Equal variances not assumed			5.678	201.029	.000	.47116	.08298	.30753	.63479

Table 4.2.3 hypothesis testing T-test result

Description:

T-test analysis was performed to find a soft skills have a significant impact on employer job performance, resulting in a difference in work readiness between male and female students with a significance level of 0.05. The results of the t-test analysis are shown in Table 4.2.3

The mean value for male students was 4.6531 and female students was 4.1820. The value of Standard Deviation (SD) for the soft skills has a significant impact on employer job performance, resulting in a difference in work readiness for male students was 0.48828 and for female students was 0.78288. The t-value was 5.738 and p-value was 0.000 As the p-value is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$) so, the hypothesis that “Soft skills have a significant impact on employer job performance, resulting in a difference in work readiness” proved accepted. Thus, hypothetically, soft skills have a significant impact on employer job performance, resulting in a difference in work readiness

Discussion

The study’s findings emphasize the rising importance of soft skills in professional contexts, with employers prioritizing candidates who exhibit effective interpersonal, problem-solving, and adaptive skills. This aligns with previous research indicating a persistent gap between the skills demanded by employers and those traditionally cultivated through academic programs. The relationship between soft skills and work readiness underscores the need for universities to actively provide opportunities for students to enhance these competencies in both academic and extracurricular settings. Considering these findings, higher education institutions must adapt by enhancing their curricula to focus on and emphasize both academic knowledge and the soft skills necessary for thriving in the modern workplace. Given the increasingly globalized work environment, fostering cultural sensitivity and adaptability should also be incorporated into soft skills training.

Future research could investigate the effectiveness of teaching approaches for soft skill development, such as project-based learning, hands-on experiences, or mentorship initiatives, to identify which approaches yield the most impactful outcomes for diverse student populations. The study’s results present clear evidence that soft skills positively influence



undergraduate students' work readiness in public universities of Karachi. Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis resulted in a value of 0.792, demonstrating strong internal consistency of the scale items and validating the instrument's effectiveness in measuring soft skills.

A t-test conducted for inferential analysis indicated a significant relationship between soft skills and work readiness across genders. Male students scored higher (mean = 4.8781) than that of female students (mean = 4.3377), resulting in a t-value of 6.532 and a p-value of 0.000, supporting the hypothesis that soft skills substantially influence work readiness. These outcomes suggest that well-developed soft skills enhance students' readiness for entering the workforce.

Further analysis showed that specific competencies communication, emotional intelligence, teamwork, time management, and leadership significantly predict work readiness. Male students consistently scored higher than female students in these areas, with an overall t-value of 5.647 and p-value of 0.000, highlighting the critical role these skills play in preparing students for professional responsibilities.

Additionally, soft skills were found to have a significant impact on employer-perceived job performance. Differences in work readiness between male and female students were evident, with mean scores of 4.6531 for males and 4.1820 for females, a t-value of 5.738, and a p-value of 0.000. This indicates that employers may perceive students with stronger soft skills as more effective and productive in professional settings. In essence this study emphasizes that soft skills are essential not only for personal development but also for professional success. Integrating soft skills training into higher education curricula is crucial to equip students with the competencies necessary to thrive in the modern, competitive workforce.

Conclusion

This research concludes that soft skills are crucial in improving the work readiness of undergraduate students at public universities in Karachi. The results indicated that students with strong soft skills, such as communication, emotional intelligence, teamwork, time management, and leadership, exhibit greater preparedness for entering the job market. These skills not only facilitate academic achievement but also enhance students' capacity to adjust to professional settings and fulfill employer expectations. The reliability analysis, which yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.792, verified that the tool utilized in this research was dependable and effectively assessed the concept of soft skills.

Moreover, the t-test outcomes revealed a statistically significant correlation between soft skills and work readiness. Male students outperformed female students in overall soft skills and work readiness, highlighting noticeable gender-based disparities in these areas. These results imply that students with well-honed soft skills are generally more confident, competent, and prepared to function effectively in professional environments. Furthermore, the findings underscored that soft skills have a substantial impact on employer-perceived job performance. Students who exhibited stronger soft skills were viewed as more productive, adaptable, and effective in the workplace. This underscores the necessity of cultivating these skills during undergraduate education to facilitate a seamless transition from academic life to professional careers. In light of the findings and discussions, this study asserts that universities should prioritize the incorporation of soft skills into their curricula. While technical knowledge is vital, equal attention must be given to the development of interpersonal and professional skills. Educational institutions ought to implement teaching methods such as project-based learning, group activities, internships, and experiential learning to bolster students' soft skills.

Recommendation

In light of the findings from this study, the following significant recommendations are suggested to improve the soft skills and work readiness of undergraduate students:

1. It is essential for universities to incorporate soft skills development into the academic curriculum as a compulsory element to ensure that students acquire vital workplace competencies.
2. Institutions ought to create specialized courses or modules that concentrate on communication, teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, and adaptability.
3. Universities should advocate for project-based and experiential learning to foster collaboration and enhance real-world problem-solving abilities.
4. Academic institutions must broaden internship opportunities and work placements to offer students practical experience and exposure to professional environments.
5. Universities should forge robust partnerships with industries to connect academic learning with employer expectations.
6. Faculty members are encouraged to conduct regular workshops and training sessions focused on communication, time management, leadership, and emotional intelligence.
7. Universities ought to integrate soft skills assessment into academic evaluations to provide students with constructive feedback regarding their performance and areas for improvement.
8. Career counseling and guidance services should be reinforced to assist students in developing professional skills and readiness for their careers.
9. Universities should motivate students to engage in extracurricular activities such as debates, presentations, and group projects to enhance their interpersonal skills.
10. Mentorship programs that involve faculty, alumni, and industry professionals should be established to support students in cultivating their soft skills.
11. Universities should arrange mock interviews, career fairs, and resume-writing workshops to improve employability skills.
12. Educational institutions should encourage the utilization of technology and digital tools to enhance communication, collaboration, and time management skills.

Reference

- Afif, N., & Arifin, A. H. (2022). Kesiapan Kerja Mahasiswa Akuntansi di Era Digital: Cukupkah Hanya Hard Skills? *KRISNA: Kumpulan Riset Akuntansi*, 14(1), 50-62.
- Akbar, T. N., Surahman, U., & Susanti, I. (2021, February). Factors affecting work readiness of grade XII students program modelling and information design skills building (DPIB) SMK Negeri 5 Bandung. In *6th UPI International Conference on TVET 2020 (TVET 2020)* (pp. 207-211). Atlantis Press.
- Alt, D., Naamati-Schneider, L., & Weishut, D. J. (2023). Competency-based learning and formative assessment feedback as precursors of college students' soft skills acquisition. *Studies in Higher Education*, 48(12), 1901-1917
- Aprilita, K. P., & Pritasari, A. (2024). The influence of soft skills development on perceived work readiness: Case of recent public university graduates. *Jurnal Ekonomi, Manajemen, Bisnis, dan Sosial (EMBISS)*, 4(4), 291-310.
- Ariasepta, R. (2022). *Pengaruh Soft Skill Terhadap Kesiapan Kerja Mahasiswa Manajemen Universitas Islam Riau Di Era Revolusi Industri 4.0* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Islam Riau).
- Ayaturrahman, J. D., & Rahayu, I. (2023, January). Dampak soft skill terhadap kesiapan kerja mahasiswa di era industry 4.0. In *Proceeding of National Conference on Accounting & Finance* (pp. 169-175).



- Azizah, D. N., Muslim, S., & Cholikh, M. (2021). The correlation of industrial work experience and soft skills on work readiness of graduated of vocational high school. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Studies*, 3(4), 248-255.
- Balbinot, E. N., Fernandes, K. A., Silveira, E. R., Cavali, B. Y., Cunhago, R. T., Pezzin, A. P. T., ... & Pinto, L. H. (2024). The influence of Soft Skills on improving productivity and promoting quality of life in generations " Z" and" Millennials". *CONTRIBUCIONES A LAS CIENCIAS SOCIALES*, 17(6), e7200-e7200.
- Bennett, N., Lemoine, P., & Whiteman, S. (2018). "Developing Soft Skills for Graduate Employability." *Higher Education Quarterly*, 72(4), 354-370
- Cambronero Alonso, H. (2021). Assessing entrepreneurial soft and hard skills in the entrepreneurial process.
- Canning, E. A., Murphy, M. C., Emerson, K. T., Chatman, J. A., Dweck, C. S., & Kray, L. J. (2020). Cultures of genius at work: Organizational mindsets predict cultural norms, trust, and commitment. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 46(4), 626-642.
- Cheang, M., & Yamashita, G. L. (2023). Employers' Expectations of University Graduates as They Transition into the Workplace. *European Journal of Education*, 6(2), 22-32.
- Cherniss, C., & Goleman, D. (2001). *The emotional intelligence workplace. How to select for measure and improve emotional intelligence in individuals, groups and organizations* san Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cherniss, C., Goleman, D., Emmerling, R., Cowan, K., & Adler, M. (1998). Bringing emotional intelligence to the workplace. *New Brunswick, NJ: Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, Rutgers University*, 1-34.
- Cherry, K. (5). Components of emotional intelligence. *Very Well Mind*.
- Cherusheva, H. (2023, February). MODELING OF" SOFT SKILLS" IN THE SYSTEM OF MANAGERIAL COMPETENCE. In *SWorld-Ger Conference proceedings* (No. gec25-01, pp. 125-128).
- Cláudia, F. P. (2024). The Impact of Soft Skills Training on the Employability of Brazilian Youth. *Research and Advances in Education*, 3(7), 11-16.
- Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence in Organizations, (2021).
- Cooper, R., & Sawaf, A. (2001). *Executive EQ: Emotional intelligence in leadership organizations*. Penguin Books.
- Cucu sutianah. (2022). PENINGKATAN SOFT SKILLS PESERTA DIDIK MELALUI INTEGRATED TEACHING AND LEARNING BERBASIS JOBSKILS DI SEKOLAH MENENGAH KEJURUAN (SMK). *JURNAL EKONOMI, SOSIAL & HUMANIORA*, 3(05), 137-148. Retrieved from <https://jurnalintelektiva.com/index.php/jurnal/article/view/695>
- Development of Soft Skills for a Successful Career and Advance Education - Dr Maneesha Kaushik, Ms. Satakshi Sharma - *IJFMR* Volume 5, Issue 6, November-December 2023. DOI 10.36948/ijfmr.2023.v05i06.8670
- Dudley, M., Khaw, D., Botti, M., & Hutchinson, A. F. (2020). The relationship between the undergraduate clinical learning environment and work readiness in new graduate nurses: A pre-post survey study. *Nurse Education Today*, 94, 104587.
- Ellis, A. M., & Bauer, T. N. (2020). 24 Organizational Entry and Workplace Affect. *The Cambridge handbook of workplace affect*, 325.
- Fakhretdinova, G. N., Osipov, P., & Dulalaeva, L. P. (2021). Extracurricular activities as an important tool in developing soft skills. In *Educating Engineers for Future Industrial Revolutions: Proceedings of the 23rd International Conference on Interactive Collaborative Learning (ICL2020)*, Volume 2 23 (pp. 480-487). Springer International Publishing.
- Fleith, D. de S., Almeida, L. S., Marinho-Araujo, C. M., Gomes, C. M. A., Bisinoto, C., & Rabelo, M. L. (2020). Validity Evidence of a Scale on Academic Expectations for Higher Education. *Paidéia (Ribeirão Preto)*, 30, e3010. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-4327e3010>
- Gebur, A. A. (2023). The Role of Soft Leadership in the Quality of Work life An Applied Study on a Sample of Employees Working in Al Aitihad Food Industries.



- GMAC. (2023). Global Graduate Survey: Employers' Preferences for Graduate Attributes. Graduate Management Admission Council.
- Handayani, A. S. KEPERCAYAAN DIRI DAN KESIAPAN KERJA SISWA.
- Hang, A. W. P., Sikarwar, T. S., Nordin, N. A. B., Rosley, N. I., Muzaffar, N., Shokri, N. A. S., & Hung, K. D. M. (2024). The Impact of Soft Skills Training on the Behavior of Multinational Technology Company Employees. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management and Education (APJME)*, 7(2), 71-86.
- Harry, T., & Chinyamurindi, W. T. (2022). "Still haven't found what I am looking for": rural black students' perceived work readiness and assessment of labor market access. *Education+ Training*, 64(2), 276-289.
- Hashimi, S. A. (2020). A Comparative Study of Higher Education in Afghanistan & Malaysia to Develop Job Skills of Afghan Graduates. *Diwan International Scientific and Research Journal*, 1(1), 39-64.
- Ilmadi & Herlina, Elda. (2023). KEMAMPUAN SOFT SKILL DAN KEMANDIRIAN BELAJAR MAHASISWA DALAM PERKULIAHAN ALJABAR ABSTRAK MELALUI MODEL PROBLEM BASED LEARNING (PBL). *Journal Lebesgue: Journal Ilmiah Pendidikan Matematika, Matematika dan Statistika*. 4. 45-53. 10.46306/lb.v4i1.168.
- Indraputri, A., & Zoraifi, R. (2020). Faktor-Faktor Yang Memengaruhi Kesiapan Kerja Siswa Program Keahlian Akuntansi Smk. *Tata Arta: Jurnal Pendidikan Akuntansi*, 6(1).
- Indrawati, S. M., & Kuncoro, A. (2021). Improving competitiveness through vocational and higher education: Indonesia's vision for human capital development in 2019–2024. *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies*, 57(1), 29-59.
- Ingsih, K., & Suhana, S. (2023). Improving Working Readiness through Mastering Soft Skills: Empirical Evidence from University Students in Indonesia. *Revista de Métodos Cuantitativos para la Economía y la Empresa*, 35, 268-279.
- Islam, R., Das, H. K., & Islam, M. (2024). Impact of Soft Skills Awareness upon Practice towards Maximizing Employability among English Graduates in Bangladesh. *i-Manager's Journal on English Language Teaching*, 14(2), 1.
- Kolmos, A., Holgaard, J. E., & Clausen, N. R. (2021). Progression of student self-assessed learning outcomes in systemic PBL. *European Journal of Engineering Education*, 46(1), 67-89.
- Kumar, A. & Sharma, M., Luthra, S., JKuregyan, A. L., & Khusainova, M. A. (2022). Soft skills as key competences for successful employability of graduate students. *Vestnik of Samara State Technical University Psychological and Pedagogical Sciences*, 19(4), 113-120.
- oshi, S. (2022). Analyzing the impact of sustainable human resource management practices and industry 4.0 technologies adoption on employability skills. *International Journal of Manpower*, 43(2), 463-485.
- Kuncoro, K. S., Kusumaningrum, B., Sulistyowati, F., Ulya, I., Setyawan, D. N., & Kartiko, W. T. (2023). An Empirical Study of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Program's Impact on Soft Skills Development among University Students. *Buana Pendidikan: Jurnal Fakultas Keguruan Dan Ilmu Pendidikan Unipa Surabaya*, 19(2), 214-222.
- Lamri, J., & Lubart, T. (2023). Reconciling Hard Skills and Soft Skills in a Common Framework: The Generic Skills Component Approach. *Journal of Intelligence*, 11(6), 107. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence11060107>
- Lau, P. L., Anctil, T., Ee, G. T., Jaafar, J. L. S., & Kin, T. G. (2020). Self-concept, attitudes toward career counseling, and work readiness of Malaysian vocational students. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 68(1), 18-31.
- Liu, Y., Li, Y., Xu, X., Dou, Y., & Liu, D. (2022). Heterogeneous skill learning for multi-agent tasks. *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems*, 35, 37011-37023.
- Livesey, P. V. (2017). Goleman-Boyatzis model of emotional intelligence for dealing with problems in project management. *Construction Economics and Building*, 17(1), 20-45.



- Lubis, D.S., Dinamika, S.G., Prana, R.R., Ismayuni, T.U., & Fathimah, V. (2022). Peningkatan Kualitas Sumber Daya Manusia Melalui Pelatihan Soft skill Pada SMA Dharma Pancasila Medan. *ABDIKAN: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat Bidang Sains dan Technology*.
- Lyu, Wenjing, and Jin Liu. 2021. Soft skills, hard skills: What matters most? Evidence from job postings. *Applied Energy* 300: 117307.
- Martins, A., Ramalho, N., and Morin, E. (2020). A comprehensive meta-analysis of the relationship between emotional intelligence and health. *Pers. Individ. Differ.* 49, 554–564. doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2010.05.029
- Mofleh, A. F. (2023). Exploring the Factors Influencing Job Finding in Afghanistan (Case study Shaikh Zayed University Economics Graduates 2019-2022). *Available at SSRN 4451052*.
- Noah, J. B., & Abdul Aziz, A. (2020). A Systematic review on soft skills development among university graduates. *EDUCATUM Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(1), 53–68. <https://doi.org/10.37134/ejoss.vol6.1.6.2020>
- Pambajeng, A. P., Sumartik, S., & Kumala, H. M. (2024). Pengaruh Pengalaman Magang, Motivasi Kerja, dan Soft Skill Terhadap Kesiapan Kerja Mahasiswa Dalam Memasuki Dunia Kerja. *Journal of Economic, Bussines and Accounting (COSTING)*, 7(2), 2864-2875.
- Pandey, V. K., & Shukla, S. (2020). The significance and role of various soft skills in professional life. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 8(3), 028-031.
- Puspitasari, D., & Danaya, B. P. (2022). Pentingnya peranan komunikasi dalam organisasi: lisan, non-verbal, dan tertulis (literature review manajemen). *Jurnal Ekonomi Manajemen Sistem Informasi*, 3(3), 257-268.
- Rahmadani, D., & Mardalis, A. (2022, June). Improving Student's Working Readiness by Increasing Soft Skills, Self-Efficacy, Motivation, and Organizational Activities. In *International Conference on Economics and Business Studies (ICOEBS 2022)* (pp. 273-279). Atlantis Press
- Rios, J. A., Ling, G., Pugh, R., Becker, D., & Bacall, A. (2020). Identifying critical 21st-century skills for workplace success: A content analysis of job advertisements. *Educational Researcher*, 49(2), 80-89.
- RIZALDO, R. T. (2020). Computer Interactive Language Studies (CILS): An Aid in Job-Hunting for Computer and Civil Engineering Graduates. *IOER International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, 2(3), 204-208.
- Robbins, S. P., & Judge, T. A. (2022). *Organizational behavior* (19th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, cognition and personality*, 9(3), 185-211.
- Sartika, D., & Nengsi, A. R. (2022). Work readiness of graduates responding to user needs for a “Ready to Work” workforce from university perspective. *Idarah (Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kependidikan)*, 6(1), 37-50.
- Tan, C. Y., Abdullah, A. G. K., & Ali, A. J. (2021). Soft Skill Integration for Inspiring Critical Employability Skills in Private Higher Education. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 92, 23-39
- USAID. (2020). *Work readiness skills standards toolkit*.
- Wang, L. A., Petrulla, V., Zampella, C. J., Waller, R., & Schultz, R. T. (2022). Gross motor impairment and its relation to social skills in autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review and two meta-analyses. *Psychological bulletin*, 148(3-4), 273.
- Warastri, N. T. (2023). Challenges and Efforts of Professional Teachers in the Era of Revolution 5.0.