

# ***Exploring the Role of Soft Skills Training in Improving Employment Prospects for Young Professionals***

**Kai Zhang**

Student Affairs department, Guangdong Polytechnic of Environmental Protection Engineering,  
Guangzhou, China, 528216. ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2174-2984>,  
Email: [steric8806@163.com](mailto:steric8806@163.com)

**Yuan Yuan\***

School of Energy Conservation and Safety, Guangdong Polytechnic of Environmental Protection  
Engineering, Guangzhou, China, 528216. ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6621-4452>,  
Email: [yuan18664804366@163.com](mailto:yuan18664804366@163.com)

**Xinming Deng**

Student Affairs department, Guangdong Polytechnic of Environmental Protection  
Engineering, Guangzhou, China, 528216. ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-3585-4978>,  
Email: [deng940@126.com](mailto:deng940@126.com)

**Dianyu Feng**

School of education department, SEGI university, Selangor, Malaysia, 500000.  
ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7256-4516>,  
Email: [SUKD2400661@segi4u.my](mailto:SUKD2400661@segi4u.my)

Recibido / Received: 16/09/2023  
Aceptado / Accepted: 22/03/2024

**Abstract:** This study examines the role of soft skills training in improving the employment prospects of young professionals, addressing the growing concern about the mismatch between graduates' competencies and labor market demands. Despite employers prioritizing interpersonal skills like communication, adaptability, and teamwork, many educational institutions continue to focus primarily on technical knowledge, neglecting soft skills development. Using a qualitative systematic literature review guided by the PRISMA framework, the study synthesizes findings from 12 peer-reviewed studies, revealing that well-designed, context-specific soft skills training programs significantly enhance job readiness, retention, and long-term career growth. However, challenges such as inconsistent delivery, ineffective assessment, and misalignment with employer expectations persist across educational systems. The study emphasizes the need to embed soft skills into formal curricula and institutional strategies, calling for pedagogical reforms and employer-integrated approaches to improve graduate employability in a rapidly changing global workforce.

**Keywords:** Soft Skills Development, Youth Employability, Professional Training, Career Readiness, Workplace Competencies.

## **1. Introduction**

### ***1.1. Background of the Research***

In the evolving landscape of the global job market, employability has increasingly come to depend not only on academic qualifications and technical expertise but also on a range of personal attributes commonly referred to as soft skills. These include communication, adaptability, leadership, teamwork, emotional intelligence, and

problem-solving abilities. As organizations shift toward more collaborative, diverse and digitally driven work environments, these skills have become essential for new graduates and early-career professionals entering the workforce (Amantaeva et al., 2024). Yet, despite their growing significance, many young professionals remain underprepared in these areas, contributing to a notable skills mismatch between higher education outputs and employer expectations.

The research gap is known to contribute to the difficulties students encounter when coming from university to employment since they possess subject knowledge but no interpersonal and professional skills that can be practiced in the workplace. It has been ascertained that currently most employers are complaining of short supply of employees who possess good soft skills. This has led to the need and demand for incorporation of soft skills developmental programs into the curricula as part of the curriculum requirements hence the notion of career readiness initiatives (Stewart, Wall & Marciniak, 2016). A number of authors currently support the notion that soft skills training elicits a positive impact in employability (Bedoya-Guerrero et al., 2024). For example, a survey conducted on the university students interviewed yielded the information that development of soft skills had a positive correlation on employment confidence (Vasanthakumari, 2019). It also highlighted that the application of these skills in the academic programs had improved the attitudes toward employability in other fields among students.

## *1.2. Problem Statement*

Despite the fact that soft skills are given great importance in international employment markets, most inexperienced young individuals often confront challenges of non-employment as they lack appropriate interpersonal and behavioral skills. Businesses also remain high on technical skills because most learning institutions still emphasize on content knowledge rather than structured soft skills instructions especially in universities. This issue mainly affects fresh graduates, employers and the economy at large because it hampers the visualization of actual employment reality and demands of the job markets. Soft skills are known to impact one's chances of getting a job or enhances career progression but their inclusion in curriculum is still disoriented (Albando & Giret, 2016). It is important, therefore, that this gap is filled so as to realize sustainability in the employment front.

## *1.3. Research Objectives*

1. To explore the perceived role of soft skills training on young professionals' ability to secure and retain meaningful employment across diverse professional fields.
2. To investigate how different institutional approaches to delivering soft skills training affect the preparedness and confidence of recent graduates entering the job market.
3. To examine how the delivery of soft skills training influences young professionals' job readiness and ability to meet employer expectations.

## *1.4. Significance of Study*

This study is important in filling this gap by systematically reviewing the impact of soft skills training on employment outcomes for young professionals. It will give information on the effectiveness of various training interventions to address job

readiness, self- efficacy and employer requirements. For instance, Charoensap-Kelly et al. (2015) showed that there is an increase in soft skills training in behavior change of interactions at the workplace regardless the mode of delivery. The same applies to the authors of this study as well: Sutil-Martin and Otamendi (2021) showed that game-based training positively affected multiple soft skills areas in university students'. Similarly, large-scale research as Gabelaia (2020) has pointed out that urgency of imparting of soft skills in university education to enhance employability of graduates. Stewart and Preiksaitis (2023) pointed that generic training approach should be replaced by one that responds to sector needs, especially in IT where there is a strong correlation between soft skill deficiencies and performance problems exist.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1. Introduction to Soft Skills and Employability*

Regarding the changes of the modern world, which demand certain types of qualification or certain competencies, and other soft competencies to be very significant and especially for young graduates, when they try to get the first workplace after getting out of school. Soft skills are personality attributes like interpersonal oral and written communication, collaboration, flexibility, self-organization, initiative, working under pressure, etc., which are closely aligned with technical competencies in the contemporary organizations (Yılmaz & Urhan, 2024). Employers value these in general and across various industries because organizations believe them to be signs of a mature and prepared candidate for work (Gabelaia, 2020; Kuregyan & Khusainova, 2022). As society becomes more globalized, employer expectations of employees' abilities in soft skills particularly, communication and interpersonal skills become more demanding. The technical qualification is still valuable, but leaders are interested in persons who can work, solve problems, and exercise self-awareness and interpersonal skills in multifaceted and quite often virtually organized teams (de Campos, de Resende & Fagundes, 2020). Another study performed by Ngo (2024) show that students at the university level know that soft skills are important for success at university and in choosing a career, but many of them do not feel prepared in this aspect.

### *2.2. The Global Skills Gap*

Several studies underscore the undeniable fact that employers' soft skills requirement and the availability of employees' skills are very different around the world. Employees form different geographic locations and various industry sectors of the economy, where employers are seeking more attributes such as communication ability, ability to think critically, collaboration, and adaptability, components that are generally not sufficiently developed in most new hires. In a survey carried out in Portugal, employers stated that graduates lacked adequate interpersonal and professional competencies; the authors mentioned that soft skills gaps lead to costs associated with employees' training and reduced productivity (Suleman & Laranjeiro, 2018). International scholars have also supported these concerns. Liu and Fernandez (2018) performed a study that shows the relationship between soft skill like influence, planning and task discretion and the occupation status in China, this aspect proves

that soft skill enhances long-term employability and mobility. In STEM areas, Karimi and Pina (2021) have identified the deficits of graduates mainly technical skills but the absence of interpersonal skills like leadership skills and emotional intelligence to integrate and progress in their careers. In the UK, Hurrell (2015) offered a different perspective, suggesting that perceived soft skills gaps may sometimes stem from organizational issues, such as poor induction and misaligned expectations, rather than solely from graduates' deficiencies.

In particular, such a gap of skills may have profound consequences for young professionals. It takes significant time and effort to meet the employers' expectations resulting to underemployment, long job search, and career stagnation. Yong and Ling (2023) pointed out a research study identifying that priority difference exist for soft skills and perception on which ones are important among graduates and employers. This misalignment if persisted remains a reason why workforce is not adequately prepared for its demand and creates a vicious cycle between the institutions of higher learning and the labor markets. Given the fact that globalization and automation are rapidly changing the requirements for different positions, it is crucial to enhance social skills so that the ability to find a decent job becomes stable in a chosen field.

### *2.3. Soft Skills Training in Higher Education*

In past years, assessing the level of soft skills integration into the curricula of higher education institutions to meet the employer's expectations of graduates with technical and people skills has become a growing priority. However, up to now there are few consistent attempts made by the universities to integrate soft skills in their programs. Lack of soft skills in the formal curriculum, Aghaee and Karunaratne (2023) observed that more than 50 percent of the students in Swedish institutions in any given time did not observe that soft skills were taught in their curriculum despite a high demand in competencies such as communication and flexibility.

Constructivist Learning Theory is useful in Soft Skill Training as much as it posits that people learn through practical application. This theory supports the argument for practical approaches like simulation, games for learning and internships that give the student the idea of actual on-field experiences and improve personality attributes like teamwork and communication (Fosnot, 1996). Such methods do not only help develop a better understanding of the material but are also relevant to satisfying the modern employer requirements. In recent past it has been published, that constructivism has a positive impact on learner's participation and brings about favorable students' characteristics that fit the workforce requirements (Orih et al., 2024). There are following factors that act as barriers at the institutional level to the implementation of soft skills training in universities. Some of these are rather rigid curriculum structures, scarcity of qualified human resource among the faculty and minimal organizational reward systems to propel innovations in teaching and learning (Malicay, 2023). Gabelai (2020) noted that despite recognition of soft skills in many organizations, they do not tend to incorporate it and particularly, have no assessment systems.

### *2.4. Training Formats and Educational Practices*

The delivery of soft skills training in higher education has evolved significantly in response to workforce demands. Universities employ various instructional approaches,

including workshops, embedded modules, and project-based learning, to teach essential soft skills like communication, teamwork, and adaptability. Orih et al. (2024) While synthesizing the results of different studies, it determined that the most effective delivery formats include are workshops and creative tasks with elements of real projects and finding that this approach should be focused on the goals of the curriculum. As for the specifics of the delivery, concepts like gamification and various games are to become widespread when it comes to motivation boosters. In their study conducted in 2021, Sutil-Martin and Otamendi proved that a 9-week plan focused on participants' soft skills using team games enhanced interpersonal and organizational competencies. In addition, Bender and Bengler (2025) have developed the concept of user-centered approach of a virtual learning environment for teamwork, critical thinking and leadership that includes interactive project management activities.

### *2.5. Role of Soft Skills Education in Employment Results*

Soft skills training has been in the recent past considered an essential input within employment regarding acquisition of jobs, performance, and career advancements. Past studies reveal that factors like communication skills, teamwork, and flexibility do affect the initial employment and employees' career progression in the future. For instance, Albanea and Giret (2016) proved that soft competencies' level is positively related to the higher wages among young French graduates especially in the business and engineering positions. More importantly, research findings point at the importance of structured soft skills development courses. Adhvaryu, Kala and Nyshadham (2018) provide evidence for the efficacy of workplace training for garment workers though a randomized evaluation and found that the trained group had 20% increase in productivity and a higher promotion probability. Nevertheless, the perk of improved productivity was the stagnation of wages because of barriers in the labor market, which demonstrated the issue remains concerning when it comes to the correlation between personal growth and wages.

### *2.6. Employer Perspectives on Soft Skills*

According to the employers of all industries, soft skills are very vital though they are used minimally when recruiting entry-level candidates. Today, other things like interpersonal skill, teamwork, flexibility and effective problem solving and decision-making are considered more valuable than technical skills. Stewart et al. (2016) surveyed college graduates where it was noted that they had overestimated their soft skills, but the employers called for 26% increase in total remuneration and lamented on communication skills, problem-solving skills and professionalism. This mismatch is to blame for hire, lengthened onboarding process and comparatively poor performance during the first years at work. It is also important to understand that different industry expectations depend on the industry that is in discussion. For instance, Rosenberg and Pack (2024) revealed that in sport management education, the faculty focused more on soft skills than on technical skills, as employers also opined that such skills influenced both the hiring decisions and the latter skills' earning potential. Similar notions prevail in other disciplines, for instance engineering and business organization where teamwork, management, and flexibility are the indicators of organizational effectiveness.

## 2.7. Cross-Cultural and Regional Variations

Soft skills are recognized all over the world, but different emphasis is placed on various competencies as well as the way the competencies are taught or perceived differently in every culture and across the world. As with any system of education, most notably those of western democracy, there is nothing as sweet as free speech and self-expression. Unlike western culture, there could be high respect in Eastern methods of communication, punctuality, structure and obedience among others. For example, in the comparison of the two countries, Jordan and Hungary, the authors Baniismail and Juhász (2024) noted that there are various cultural differences in perceiving certain soft skills. Jordanian students specifically focused on responsibility and self-awareness while preserving on communication and problem-solving skills as the most valued by Hungarians. Such cultural differences also affect the design and effectiveness of education to employability bridges. In general, in Australia, De Sisto and Dickinson (2019) point to the use of 'Cultural Intelligence Evenings' with RMIT University students where students are offered some cultural values to help them cultivate empathy to embrace the differences.

## 2.8. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Human Capital Theory, which posits that investments in education and skill development enhance an individual's productivity and employability. Intangible skills that are hard to measure include communication skills, interpersonal skills, and flexibility, which are realized as important factors of human capital for those countries that are transforming towards knowledge-based economies (Fosnot, 1996). The research also relies on teaching theory which postulates that knowledge is constructed using experiences and interactions which is in consonant with hands on training such as simulations and internships. Career Development Theory is also useful for understanding factors related to employment advancement and indicates that personal skills and factors of the external environment play a role in forming one's career paths (Savickas, 1997).

## 2.9. Literature Gap

While the literature consistently underscores the value of soft skills in enhancing employability, several key gaps remain. Few research are made to tease out the long-time career effects of soft skills training while people-gauged work has mostly measured impressionistic orientations or short-term effect. Moreover, there is not much experimental and theoretical literature on context-appropriate implementation, especially in the cultural or institutional environment. There is also the research gap where limited professional literature describes daily experiences of young professionals aspiring to work after completing their education. Orih et al. (2024) underscore in their systematic review that those factors result from a lack of meta-frameworks and comparative models to hinder, phases scale up and customization of the soft skill initiatives.

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1. Research Method and Design

The current study employs a qualitative research approach with a Systematic

Literature Review (SLR) study design. The SLR method also provide a logics framework for integrating data and structuring them in a systematic way that would render them useful for identifying themes, patterns, and gaps in the selected literature (Siddaway, Wood & Hedges, 2019). The study selection involves adhering to the PRISMA checklists that enable the systematic assessment for replication on the different stages of selecting studies for the review.

### 3.2. Data Collection Method

#### 3.2.1. Searching Techniques

##### 3.2.1.1. Keywords

Keywords were carefully selected to align with the research objectives and ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant academic sources. The primary keywords used include “soft skills training”, “employability of young professionals”, “graduate job readiness”, “soft skills and job retention”, and “institutional approaches to soft skills education” etc.

##### 3.2.2. Database

The data were sourced from reputable academic databases to ensure the quality and credibility of the literature reviewed. The databases used include JSTOR, Web of Science (WOS), Google Scholar, and Research gate.

##### 3.2.3. Boolean Operators

The operator AND is used to combine multiple keywords (e.g., " soft skills training AND employability of young professionals"), ensuring results address both terms. OR broadens the search by including related terms (e.g., " graduate job readiness" OR “soft skills and job retention”). NOT excludes irrelevant results (e.g., " institutional approaches to soft skills education NOT “employer expectations and soft skills”).

##### 3.2.4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Following is the Inclusion and Exclusion criteria is used as shown in Table 1.

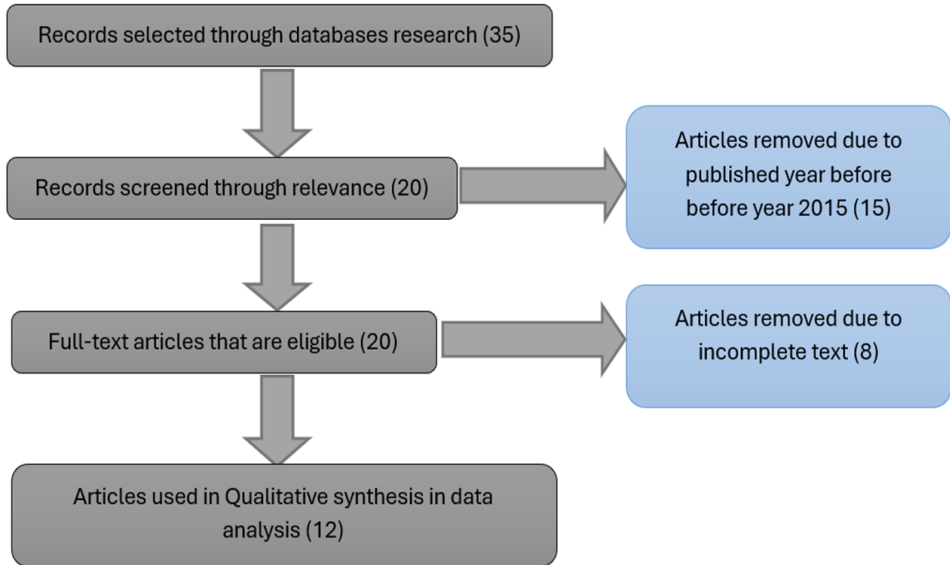
Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
<b>Publication</b>	Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and credible reports published in last 15 years.	Non-peer-reviewed sources, grey literature, and articles before year 2015.
<b>Research type</b>	Empirical and theoretical studies relevant to public art, institutional theory, or post-industrial landscapes.	Studies with insufficient academic rigor, lacking relevance to the topic, or focusing solely on aesthetics.
<b>Language</b>	Articles written in English to ensure consistent analysis.	Articles written in languages other than English.
<b>Focus</b>	Studies addressing public art, community belonging, cultural regeneration, and institutional frameworks.	Literature unrelated to public art or missing intersections with community belonging and cultural aspects.

### 3.3. Selection of Papers Through PRISMA Framework

A systematic selection process was carried out following the PRISMA framework to maintain transparency and rigor. Out of an initial pool of 35 articles, 12 were chosen based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The PRISMA flow diagram summarizing this process is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: PRISMA Framework.



### 3.4. Data Analysis Method

#### 3.4.1. Data Analysis Method

This study employs thematic analysis to examine the data. The steps involved in the process are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Thematic Analysis Steps.

Steps	Description
<b>Familiarization</b>	It includes reading and re-reading of all the collected dated.
<b>Initial codes</b>	Generating initial codes from the data by highlighting key points, concepts, and ideas relevant to the research objectives.
<b>Initial themes</b>	Codes are then grouped to develop the broader themes.
<b>Reviewing themes</b>	Themes are reviewed to ensure that they are not distracted from original research focus and objectives.
<b>Defining and Naming themes</b>	According to the focus of the data collected, it include defining and naming themes according to the context of the content of the articles selected.
<b>Producing the Report</b>	Utilize these themes in data analysis and discussion

### 3.5. Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations of this study focus on maintaining the integrity and

credibility of the research process. As the study is based on secondary data and does not involve direct interaction with human participants, the risk of harm is minimal. To ensure academic honesty, all sources are properly cited, and plagiarism is strictly avoided by adhering to established ethical guidelines. Due to the incoming and outgoing flow of data, the procedure of choosing literature and samples is rigorous to ensure the legitimacy of the findings. In addition, the work complies with various ethical procedures for systematic reviews, thus implying that data retrieved from various sources are not distorted as confirmed by other studies.

#### 4. Results

Table 3 below shows the analysis of the reviewed data grouped in tables with their actual interpretations answering the research objectives as it is demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Thematic Analysis Steps.

Themes	Description
<b>Perceived Impact of Soft Skills on Employment</b>	This theme focuses on the impact of soft skills training on the competency of youth in relation to their employment status and prospects in each career, as well as in different fields, based on impressions of the practical applicability of soft skills.
<b>Institutional Strategies for Soft Skills Delivery</b>	This theme investigates how various institutional procedures and various curriculum strategies enhance preparedness and confidence of fresh graduates to engage the market force.
<b>Alignment with Employer Expectations</b>	In this theme the focus is on how effectively the soft skills training implemented contributes towards employability skills and level at which graduates align with employers in professionalism.

##### *Theme 1: Perceived Impact of Soft Skills on Employment*

The below Table 4 highlights how soft skills training affects employability and job retention among young professionals through communication, teamwork and job performance.

##### *Summary*

The above-mentioned studies demonstrate that soft skills training positively influences employment outcomes across various contexts. Stewart and Preiksaitis (2023) showed improved communication and performance in IT through tailored training, while Sutil-Martín and Otamendi (2021) highlighted the success of gamified learning in higher education. Barrera-Osorio et al. (2020) found that soft skills significantly enhance job stability and earnings in vocational settings. Gabelaia (2020) revealed that although soft skills programs are valued in European universities, delivery needs improvement. Collectively, these studies underscore that structured, context-sensitive training boosts job readiness, employability confidence, and long-term career development for young professionals.

Table 4: SLR for the Perceived Impact of Soft Skills on Employment.

Study	Objectives	Methodology	Data Analysis and Results	Conclusion
(Stewart & Preiksaitis, 2023)	To explore effective soft skills training practices for IT professionals and their impact on workplace performance.	Qualitative interviews with IT leaders and employees in the U.S.	Thematic analysis identified improved organizational efficiency and satisfaction through customized soft skills training.	Effective soft skills training leads to better workplace communication and performance in the IT sector.
(Sutil-Martin & Otamendi, 2021)	To evaluate the impact of a serious game-based soft skills training program on university and vocational students.	Experimental pilot project using pre- and post-assessments.	Increased soft skills development across all measured categories with gender and institution-specific differences.	Gamified training is a promising tool for developing soft skills in higher education.
(Barrera-Osorio et al., 2020)	To assess the long-term employment effects of soft skills training in vocational education.	Randomized controlled trial in Colombia using survey and administrative data.	Soft skills training enhanced employment stability and sustained wages more than technical skills alone.	Integrating soft skills into vocational training leads to lasting employment benefits.
(Gabelaia, 2020)	To examine the effectiveness of soft skills programs in higher education and their relevance to employment.	Mixed-method approach including interviews and online surveys in a European university context.	Top soft skills included communication, leadership, and teamwork; programs were valued but needed improved delivery.	Structured soft skills training supports graduate confidence and employability.

### *Theme 2: Institutional Strategies for Soft Skills Delivery*

The Table 5 below analyzes how institutions include soft skills training in curricula, national curriculum, and principles of teaching and learning.

Table 5: SLR for the Institutional Strategies for Soft Skills Delivery.

Study	Objectives	Methodology	Data Analysis and Results	Conclusion
(Sudana et al., 2015)	To analyze how soft skills are conceptualized and integrated into vocational teacher training systems.	Conceptual and policy analysis using national education standards in Europe.	Framed soft skills as universal competencies; emphasized need for alignment between institutional and national standards.	Institutions must adopt standardized frameworks to embed soft skills into teacher training effectively.
(Murzina, 2022)	To assess the effectiveness of soft skills development in vocational education teacher training programs.	Monitoring and content analysis of European training curricula.	Found inconsistencies in training delivery and gaps in interpersonal and self-regulation skills development.	Reform in institutional practices is essential for systematic integration of soft skills into vocational education.
(Balcar et al., 2018)	To evaluate perceptions of soft skills development among vocational school leaders and teachers in Czech education.	Quantitative study using structured questionnaires.	Found consensus on the value of soft skills but inconsistency in development practices across institutions.	Institutional strategies must align training methods with recognized soft skills needs.
(Li et al., 2017)	To examine the challenges and current practices of soft skills cultivation in Chinese vocational colleges.	Mixed methods including surveys, curriculum analysis, and interviews.	Minimal integration of soft skills identified; recommended structured curriculum reform and faculty training.	Chinese institutions should redesign soft skills delivery through systematic educational reforms.

## Summary

The above mentioned studies highlight varied institutional approaches to soft skills delivery, emphasizing the importance of policy alignment and curriculum reform. Sudana et al. (2015) and Murzina (2022) stress the need for standardized frameworks and reforms in teacher training across Europe to address delivery inconsistencies. Balcar et al. (2018) found a shared recognition of soft skills' value but noted uneven implementation in Czech vocational schools. Li et al. (2017) revealed limited integration in Chinese colleges, advocating for structured curriculum redesign and faculty training. Collectively, these findings underscore the urgency of systemic strategies for effective soft skills education.

### Theme 3: Alignment with Employer Expectations

The below Table 6 focuses on the alignment between soft skills training in education and the expectations of employers in real world job settings.

Table 6: SLR for the Alignment with Employer Expectations.

Study	Objectives	Methodology	Data Analysis and Results	Conclusion
(Stewart et al., 2016)	To investigate business graduates' perceptions of soft skills. That are required for job effectiveness and comparing them with employer expectations.	Survey study with 108 new hires in the U.S.	Communication skills (oral/written) were ranked as most essential; revealed a mismatch between what is taught and what is needed.	Universities must align soft skills training with the real expectations of employers to enhance job readiness.
(Cheang & Yamashita, 2020)	To explore employer expectations of university graduates' soft skills during hiring and after internships.	Mixed methods include online surveys and focus groups with employers.	Employers ranked soft skills like initiative, communication, and work ethic as crucial for workplace success.	Greater emphasis is needed in higher education on soft skill development aligned with employer-defined competencies.
(Karimova, 2020)	To compare soft skills awareness and expectations between recent graduates and employers in Hungary.	Two-phase quantitative surveys with students and employers.	Both groups recognized the importance of soft skills but identified misalignment in training methods and employer needs.	Bridging the expectation gap requires restructured, employer-informed educational approaches.
(Karimi & Pina, 2021)	To assess perceived preparedness of college students in four soft skills valued by employers.	Survey distributed to student athletes and general student population at Lynn University, USA.	Notable gap found between student self-perceptions and employer expectations in communication, teamwork, problem solving, and creativity.	Universities must better align soft skills development with industry demand to reduce graduate-employer disconnect.

## Summary

The above mentioned studies emphasize the persistent gap between graduate soft skills and employer expectations. Stewart et al. (2016) and Karimi and Pina (2021) found significant discrepancies between what students believe they possess and what employers require, particularly in communication and teamwork. Cheang

and Yamashita (2020) highlighted the importance of initiative and work ethic, urging higher education to align training with real-world needs. Karimova (2020) showed that both employers and graduates value soft skills, yet training methods often fall short. These studies collectively advocate employer-informed curricula to enhance graduate readiness and reduce workforce entry gaps.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Perceived Impact of Soft Skills on Employment

The analysis of SLR studies on Perceived Impact of Soft Skills on Employment indicating how soft skills training influences the young graduate's ability to secure and retain employment by improving communication, teamwork, and job performance.

Stewart and Preiksaitis (2023) provided key insights into the role of soft skills in enhancing workplace performance within the IT sector. Several participants' interviews further showed that organizational specific soft skills training produce enhanced communication and work enhancing operations. This corresponds with the work of de Campos et al. (2020) who noted that employers valued employee skills as well as the interpersonal skills such as flexibility and teamwork more than specialized skills. In one of the professions where cooperation and client relations may remain unnoticed, this paper emphasizes the significance of adopting soft competencies in the curriculum of the IT sector.

The experimental study by Sutil-Martín and Otamendi (2021) offers a valuable perspective on pedagogical innovation, specifically the use of serious games in soft skills training. In these components, the mathematics experts got statistically significant enhancements in aspects including communication, leadership, and teamwork, hence supporting the possibility of experiential learning. This is in line with Orih et al. (2024) who supports its use of creative and unique styles which are student-centric. Consequently, the study also mentioned that gender and the institution also affected the dropout rate and decisions of students, which calls for different models and not general ones.

Barrera-Osorio et al. (2020) randomized controlled trial represents one of the most rigorous efforts to measure the employment impact of soft skills. Their studies held in Colombia point at the fact that, those learners receiving soft skills training have higher job retention and moderate wages as compared to those trained on technical content only. This adds further actual evidence to the authors of Adhvaryu et al. (2018) who also identified productivity improvements from workplace soft skills interventions. Notably, Barrera-Osorio and Kugler's study also considered the role of complementary support mechanisms, such as stipends, in maximizing the impact of training.

Gabelaia (2020) explored how soft skills are implemented within European higher education, revealing that while universities recognize their value, the delivery of training is often inconsistent. In the questionnaires completed by the students themselves, they pointed out that communication, leadership, and teamwork skills were seen as essential in the prospects of employment, nevertheless, in the structured curricula presented by the institution, there are no systematic programs offered that would help develop such skills in the students. This is in line with the study of Aghaee and Karunaratne (2023) that asserted that more than half of the university students in Sweden have low self-confidence level of soft skills. Gabelaia's observations resonate

with the global trend of appreciating the need for establishing a standard curriculum for the intentioned soft skill teaching pedagogy.

## *5.2. Theoretical Implications*

These findings reinforce human capital theory, highlighting soft skills as key assets that enhance employability, job retention, and productivity. They also back up the constructivist-learning theory in arguing that the gamification techniques such as those used in this case provide a better learning experience since the students can learn by practicing what they are learning. Research shows that there are a number of discrepancies between the institutions and the working environment, which point towards the fact that there is a need to change the existing models of education. These insights urge scholars to listen to the overall theoretical relationship between the design of curriculum, training of soft skills, and employment demand to focus on the flexible model that fits employers' requirements in different educational and work fields in future studies.

## *5.3. Institutional Strategies for Soft Skills Delivery*

The analysis of SLR studies on Institutional Strategies for Soft Skills Delivery examines how institutions implement soft skills training through curricular strategies, national standards, and pedagogical frameworks.

Sudana et al. (2015) give the broad view by defining soft skills as “general competencies” and supporting the systemization of these skills into the curricula of vocational teachers. Their studies are based on European educational standards; that stress the institutional relevance of the link between the learning of dispositional competencies and national curricula. This is similar to Chelin et al. (2020)'s earlier suggestions regarding the utilisation of generic integrated curriculum “capsules” which combines career decision-making with specific skills development.

Following from this, Murzina (2022) takes the argument further through a content analysis of curriculum in vocational education in Europe to establish the fact that there is a lack of coherent approach towards teaching as well as assessing soft skills. The study identifies a number of structural issues that relate to discrete instructional approaches, and the faculty's lack of preparation for interpersonal relationships. These findings are similar to those of Malicay (2023) who noted lack of flexibility of academic curriculum and lack of supportive workplace policies as having implication on low integration of soft skills.

Balcar et al. (2018) use a different, more pragmatic and empirical approach in their study by distributing questionnaires to leaders and teachers at vocational schools in the Czech Republic. They find a measure of appreciation of the soft skills, particularly, Communication and Interpersonal skills but at the same time portrays a general lapse in the methods of teaching them. This is in line with what Aghaee and Karunaratne (2023) have seen where it was ideal to show that despite the understanding that both students and educators appreciate soft skills, institutionalization of the same has not received much effort and support.

Lastly, Li et al. (2017) conduct a qualitative and quantitative study to investigate soft skills training in vocational colleges from a Chinese context. It shows a general lack of curricular focus on soft skills and sets the following general and specific

recommendations for change: Faculty development and Infrastructure which also aligns with Sutil-Martín and Otamendi (2021). This suggests of an integrated model between the theory and practice for the Chinese vocational education program. It is important that is Li et al.'s study is especially valuable since it also provides practical suggestions: Overcoming this mismatch will require redesigning course content, as well as designing special training spaces.

#### *5.4. Theoretical Implications*

These findings suggest the need to extend and deepen concepts regarding the institutional and curriculum on how soft skills can be taught as central learning competencies. As stipulated by Sudana et al. (2015), alignment with the national framework is consistent with the systemic curriculum theory, while, as pointed out by Murzina (2022) some inconsistencies point to the lack of implementation models. These identify that, there is a need to extend organizational learning and instructional leadership paradigms to accommodate faculty development and policy integration.

#### *5.5. Alignment with Employer Expectations*

The analysis of SLR studies of Alignment with Employer Expectations focuses on the alignment between soft skills training in education and the expectations of employers in real world job settings.

In its turn, the research by Stewart et al. (2016) would make the first attempt to fill the gap in the literature addressing the mismatch of soft skills between business graduates and employers. According to their survey they found out that interpersonal skills, oral and written skills were the most important, yet they are the ones that are largely missing in the graduates. This finding mirrors those of Stewart et al. (2016), who also highlighted a mismatch between student self-perceptions and actual employer needs. The study underscores the importance of aligning academic instruction with practical workplace competencies and confirms that institutions must take employer feedback seriously in curricular design.

Cheang and Yamashita (2020) build on this discussion by exploring employers' perspective of public identity conditions in various industries using both quantitative and qualitative methods. They aspects such as initiative, work ethic, and how this correlated well with communication skills as being important in the findings made by their study. These findings are similar to those reported by Orih et al. (2024) as they also pointed out that there is more focus in delivering skills and knowledge, which are not relevant to interpersonal and behavioral skills demanded in the labor market.

Karimova (2020) investigated the alignment between graduate perceptions of their soft skills development and actual employer demands. Their findings revealed a significant perception gap, with students overestimating their preparedness in areas like teamwork and adaptability. This resonates with studies by Aghaee and Karunaratne (2023) and Karimi and Pina (2021), who found similar misalignments between academic preparation and job-readiness. Karimova (2020) emphasized the importance of targeted pedagogical strategies and employer-informed curriculum reform.

Lastly, Karimi and Pina (2021) give a specific perspective to student self-estimation of their soft skills readiness in a university in US and there is a major discrepancy

between self-perception and employer expectation. The survey was inclusively oriented and revealed a low level of developed competencies in such areas as teamwork, problem solving and creativity skills that are mentioned by employers as essential ones. This raises questions to the extent to which the so-called gainful incidental learning of soft skills is adequate in the traditional learning context.

### 5.6. Theoretical implications

The above implications underscore fundamental issues inherent to employability theory and graduate readiness models especially in relation to the incorporation of employer feedback into the courses. Research shows that previous models suggest overestimated students' readiness indicates some problems in self-efficacy and competency-based education theories. These aspects reflect changes in the career developmental framework and work integrated learning also in reference to the current labor market demands and goals that should be met through academic achievement.

## 6. Conclusion

This study systematically explored the role of soft skills training in improving employment prospects for young professionals by synthesizing recent empirical and conceptual research. The synthesis underscored the fact that although competencies like communication, interpersonal relation, negotiation, and flexibility have become core competencies universally, their application in the higher learning institution is still sporadic. The major issues known are setting curriculum, choice of strategies to be used in delivering the curriculum, and how to ensure that it meets the expectations of employers. The evidence produced in each of the themes, namely perceived impact, institutions' activities and approaches, and areas of alignment with the demands of the business world, all pointed out that structured and contextual training indeed enhanced employability, retention of jobs, and advancement within the career path. Still, gaps have emerged in some crucial areas because of the correlation between academic enrollment and supply and demand in labor markets. The results therefore underpin the need for and use of experiential pedagogy of programs that are in tune with the employer's perspective that is a departure from a lecture-based approach.

The study also calls for systemic reforms in higher education and vocational training to ensure that soft skills are embedded in policy, curriculum, and assessment. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies, standardized evaluation models, and culturally responsive strategies that consider diverse labor markets. Ultimately, soft skills training must evolve from optional enrichment to a central pillar of professional education for sustainable employability in a dynamic global economy.

## References

- Adhvaryu, A., Kala, N. & Nyshadham, A. (2018). *The Skills to Pay the Bills: Returns to On-the-job Soft Skills Training* (Working Paper No. 24313). National Bureau of Economic Research. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3386/w24313>
- Aghaee, N. & Karunaratne, T. (2023). Soft Skills Demand and Supply Through the Lens of Higher Education Students. *European Conference on e-Learning*, 22(1), pp. 1-10. doi: <https://doi.org/10.34190/ecel.22.1.1639>

- Albandea, I. & Giret, J.-F. (2016). Soft-skills and labour market outcomes: the case of young people French graduates. In *Competence 2016 Wageningen*. Retrieved from <https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01413126>
- Amantaeva, R. K., Sartanova, N. T., Bekturganova, R. C. & Baizhanova, L. A. N. (2024). Research of the influence of soft skills on confidence in further employment of students. *Bulletin of "Turan" University*, (4), pp. 227-241. doi: <https://doi.org/10.46914/1562-2959-2024-1-4-227-241>
- Balcar, J., Šimek, M. & Filipová, L. (2018). Soft Skills of Czech Graduates. *Review of Economic Perspectives*, 18(1), pp. 45-60. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2478/revecp-2018-0003>
- Baniismail, M. & Juhász, T. (2024). Exploring cross-cultural variations in perceived soft skills among business students: A comparative analysis between Jordan and Hungary. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 22(3), pp. 582-592. doi: [https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.22\(3\).2024.44](https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.22(3).2024.44)
- Barrera-Osorio, F., Kugler, A. & Silliman, M. (2020). *Hard and Soft Skills in Vocational Training: Experimental Evidence from Colombia* (Working Paper No. 27548). National Bureau of Economic Research. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3386/w27548>
- Bedoya-Guerrero, A., Basantes-Andrade, A., Rosales, F. O., Naranjo-Toro, M. & León-Carlosama, R. (2024). Soft Skills and Employability of Online Graduate Students. *Education Sciences*, 14(8), pp. 864. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14080864>
- Bender, J. & Bengler, K. (2025). Digital Teaching to Develop Soft Skills – A User-Centered Approach. In T. Ahram, W. Karwowski, C. Martino, G. D. Bucchianico, & V. Maselli (Eds.), *Intelligent Human Systems Integration (IHSI 2025): Integrating People and Intelligent Systems. AHFE (2025) International Conference* (Vol. 160). AHFE International. doi: <https://doi.org/10.54941/ahfe1005877>
- Charoensap-Kelly, P., Broussard, L., Lindsly, M. & Troy, M. (2015). Evaluation of a Soft Skills Training Program. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 79(2), pp. 154-179. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490615602090>
- Cheang, M. & Yamashita, G. L. (2020). Employers' Expectations of University Graduates as They Transition into the Workplace. *European Journal of Social Science Education and Research*, 7(3), pp. 27. doi: <https://doi.org/10.26417/423zyk211>
- Chelin, N., Socias Camacho, M. D. M., Rouvrais, S. & Matthíasdóttir, G. (2020). Career decision-making learning activities in STEM: An integrated capsule model for higher and VET education. *EDULEARN Proceedings*, 1, pp. 8390-8400. doi: <https://doi.org/10.21125/edulearn.2020.2064>
- de Campos, D. B., de Resende, L. M. M. & Fagundes, A. B. (2020). The importance of soft skills for the engineering. *Creative Education*, 11(8), pp. 1504-1520. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2020.118109>
- De Sisto, M. & Dickinson, G. (2019). Investigating Strategies for Developing Cultural Intelligence: A Creative Learning Experience to Enhance Student Transition to a Global Workforce. In B. Tynan, T. McLaughlin, A. Chester, C. Hall-van den Elsen, & B. Kennedy (Eds.), *Transformations in Tertiary Education* (pp. 145-161). Springer Singapore. doi: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9957-2\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-9957-2_12)

- Fosnot, C. T. (1996). *Constructivism: Theory, Perspectives, and Practice*. Teachers College Press.
- Gabelaia, I. (2020). Soft skills training: College teaching that matters and learning that lasts for emerging professionals. *IJASOS- International E-journal of Advances in Social Sciences*, 6(17), pp. 716-723. doi: <https://doi.org/10.18769/ijasos.789514>
- Hurrell, S. A. (2015). Rethinking the soft skills deficit blame game: Employers, skills withdrawal and the reporting of soft skills gaps. *Human Relations*, 69(3), pp. 605-628. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726715591636>
- Karimi, H. & Pina, A. (2021). Strategically Addressing the Soft Skills Gap Among STEM Undergraduates. *Journal of Research in STEM Education*, 7(1), pp. 21-46. doi: <https://doi.org/10.51355/jstem.2021.99>
- Karimova, N. U. Q. (2020). Soft Skills Development in Higher Education. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(5), pp. 1916-1925. doi: <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2020.080528>
- Kuregyan, 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), pp. 113-120. doi: <https://doi.org/10.17673/vsgtu-pps.2022.4.9>
- Li, X.-q., Gong, F.-m. & Zeng, P. (2017). A Study on the Cultivation Modes of Students' Soft Skills in Higher Vocational Colleges. *DEStech Transactions on Social Science, Education and Human Science*, (emse). doi: <https://doi.org/10.12783/dtssehs/emse2017/12744>
- Liu, H. & Fernandez, F. (2018). *Examining the Ways that Numeracy Skills and Soft Skills are Related to Occupational Status: The Case of US Workers* (TD/TNC 137.668). American Institutes for Research PIAAC (AIR-PIAAC). Retrieved from [https://piaacgateway.com/s/Liu\\_Fndz\\_Soft\\_Skills\\_Report\\_2018\\_Final-wcr2.pdf](https://piaacgateway.com/s/Liu_Fndz_Soft_Skills_Report_2018_Final-wcr2.pdf)
- Malicay, L., G. (2023). The Integration of Soft Skills in Professional Education: Exploring the Importance of Communication, Teamwork, and Interpersonal Skills in Professional Training and the Methods Used to Incorporate them into Educational Programs. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Science, Communication and Technology (IJARSCT)*, 3(1), pp. 836-843. doi: <https://doi.org/10.48175/ijarsct-11967>
- Murzina, K. B. (2022). Development of Soft-Skills as an Integral Part of Secondary Vocational Education. *Transport Technician: Education and Practice*, 3(4), pp. 386-391. doi: <https://doi.org/10.46684/2687-1033.2022.4.386-391>
- Ngo, T. T. A. (2024). The Importance of Soft Skills for Academic Performance and Career Development—From the Perspective of University Students. *International Journal of Engineering Pedagogy (IJEP)*, 14(3), pp. 53-68. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijep.v14i3.45425>
- Orih, D., Heyeres, M., Morgan, R., Udah, H. & Tsey, K. (2024). A systematic review of soft skills interventions within curricula from school to university level. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, pp. 1383297. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2024.1383297>
- Rosenberg, J. & Pack, S. (2024). Faculty Perceptions of Soft and Hard Skills in Sport Management Curricula. *The COSMA Journal*, 1(1), pp. 8. doi: <https://doi.org/10.25035/cosma.01.01.08>

- Savickas, M. L. (1997). Advancing Life-Span, Life-Space Theory: Introduction to the Special Section. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 45(3), pp. 236-237. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.1997.tb00467.x>
- Siddaway, A. P., Wood, A. M. & Hedges, L. V. (2019). How to Do a Systematic Review: A Best Practice Guide for Conducting and Reporting Narrative Reviews, Meta-Analyses, and Meta-Syntheses. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 70(1), pp. 747-770. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010418-102803>
- Stewart, C., Wall, A. & Marciniak, S. (2016). Mixed Signals: Do College Graduates Have the Soft Skills That Employers Want? *Competition Forum*, 14(2), pp. 276-281. Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/openview/fa7c5369a44d3fc071a43203a1ef6d5e>
- Stewart, K. R. & Preiksaitis, M. K. (2023). Information Technology Soft Skills Training. *CORALS' Journal of Applied Research*, 1(1), pp. 1-10. doi: <https://doi.org/10.58593/cjar.v1i1.13>
- Sudana, I. M., Raharjo, D. W. & Suprpto, E. (2015). Soft Skills Competence Development of Vocational Teacher Candidates. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan*, 32(1), pp. 19-24. doi: <https://doi.org/10.15294/jpp.v32i1.5703>
- Suleman, F. & Laranjeiro, A. M. C. (2018). The Employability Skills of Graduates and Employers' Options in Portugal. *Education + Training*, 60(9), pp. 1097-1111. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/et-10-2017-0158>
- Sutil-Martín, D. L. & Otamendi, F. J. (2021). Soft Skills Training Program Based on Serious Games. *Sustainability*, 13(15), pp. 8582. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13158582>
- Vasanthakumari, S. (2019). Soft Skills and Its Application in Work Place. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*, 3(2), pp. 66-72. doi: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2019.3.2.0057>
- Yılmaz, B. & Urhan, B. (2024). The Importance of Soft Skills in Employability: A Two-Way Perspective. *Alanya Akademik Bakış*, 8(3), pp. 941-955. doi: <https://doi.org/10.29023/alanyaakademik.1508405>
- Yong, B. P. P. & Ling, Y.-L. (2023). Skills Gap: The Perceptions of Importance of Soft Skills in Graduate Employability Between Employers and Graduates. *Journal of Techno-Social*, 15(1), pp. 16-33. doi: <https://doi.org/10.30880/jts.2023.15.01.002>