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An Investigation into the Soft Skills of Prospective Teachers

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Abstract: Soft skills encompass personality, attitude, and behavior attributes, distinguishing them from formal or technical knowledge. Despite their pivotal role in ensuring success, these skills are challenging to showcase through traditional credentials like CVs, diplomas, or certificates, requiring specialized evaluation. Critical soft skills include communication, problem-solving, time management, teamwork, and leadership, which are particularly crucial for teachers given their central contribution to developing their societies. This quantitative study has investigated the soft skills of prospective teachers aiming to get a teaching certification in Morocco. It has employed a soft skills survey adapted from the Brookings Soft Skills Report Card to collect data. Participants' responses to the five-point items were analyzed using SPSS 21.0. Results have revealed significant variations in perceived soft skills among future teachers based on their majors and seniority, with no discernible correlation between these skills and gender. The findings aim to enhance the literature on student-teachers, offering practical implications derived from the study's outcomes.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Prospective Teachers, Student-Teachers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Various studies have broadly highlighted the basic interface between the social and financial well-being of countries and the quality of their labor constrain, which is intrinsically tied to instruction. Research has reliably illustrated a positive affiliation between a country's financial improvement and the standard of instruction over different levels (Hanushek, & Woessmann, 2020; Mishra, 2016; Omar-Fauzee, & Daud, 2015; Saviotti, Pyka, & Jun, 2016;). Given the urgent part of instructors within the instructive handle, it can be deduced that the socio-economic well-being of a community altogether impacts the execution of viable

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instructors at a few instructive levels. Correspondingly, existing writing underscores the effect of instructor quality and competencies on the victory of their understudies (Lavilles and Robles (2017). A think about conducted in a few schools in South Africa by Fleischmann (2013) uncovered that instructors seen as 'excellent' illustrate more noteworthy intrapersonal behavioral, interpersonal conceptual, and successful soft skills. This analyst too emphasized an extended part for instructors, including person understudy improvement, classroom administration, school-wide learning community advancement, and associations with the broader community and world. According to Fleischman, there are four levels of duty: person understudy, classroom, school, and guardians and the more extensive community, highlighting the requirement for competence in soft skills, characterized as characteristics related to identity, state of mind, and behavior instead of formal information (Greenery & Tilly, 1996, p. 253). Despite constituting 85% of one's victory (Wats & Wats, 2009), these abilities are challenging to illustrate through conventional qualifications.

2. RELATED WORKS

Soft skills are especially pivotal for instructors. They can be depicted as central to educating and learning forms, as they include communication, problem-solving, time administration, collaboration, and authority (Ünsal & Çetin, 2019). Subsequently, various studies have been conducted on the significance of these abilities in teachers' preparation and to recognize issues affecting their improvement in both pre-service and in-service instructors. Kara and Çam (2007) proposed that incorporating creativity within the "Advancement and Learning" course contributes to the improvement of collaborative and self-management abilities in pre-service instructors. Seven and Yoldaş (2007) found no sexual orientation relationship with soft skills in pre-service classroom instructors, whereas Girgin, Çetingöz, and Ekinci-Vural (2011) detailed no gender-based relationship but observed higher scores for male understudies within the measurement of emotional control. Another examination by Çetinkaya (2011) demonstrated positive views on communication skills among pre-service instructors, with a factually noteworthy relationship related to sexual orientation and status, favoring female and less senior pre-service instructors, individually.

Balakrishnan and Anbuthasan (2016) highlighted noteworthy contrasts in team-building abilities between rustic and urban instructors, as well as varieties in computer skills, verbal communication, organizational capacity, authority, and team-building skills between state and private school instructors. Sezer (2016) detailed a relationship between the soft skills of planned preschool instructors and their status in higher instruction. Lavilles and Robles (2017) indicated an essential relationship between teachers' capability in soft skills and school execution within the Philippines.

Essentially, Pumacayo-Quispe (2018) built up a solid association between teachers' soft skills and the organizational climate in Peru. Romero-Cobeña (2019) surveyed the soft skills of instructors in Ecuador and found that instructors play essential parts as coaches, keeping up successful administration of the quality of instruction inside the instructive unit. Peabody (2019) attested that school directors respected soft skills as conclusive for effective teaching,

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emphasizing the significance of instructors building up associations with understudies through positive connections, counting the capacity to recognize, get it, and manage emotions for the good thing about understudy learning.

In a quantitative study conducted in Peru, Guzmán-Britto (2019) distinguished vital contrasts within the teachers' soft skills in open instructive education. De Paniza (2019) conducted a venture on the advancement of soft skills for instructors and instructing executives in Colombia, prescribing the integration of a subject on soft skills into educational programs from preschool to high school. Additionally, Streltsova and Ivanova (2020) underscored the need for decided endeavors in creating the soft skills of Russian instructors.

The current ponder pointed to look at the viewpoints of Moroccan pre-service teachers on their soft skills. Particularly, it looked to decide whether there were noteworthy contrasts in these skills based on sexual orientation, rank, and major. Subsequently, the taking after inquire about questions were defined:

1. What recognitions do pre-service instructors have concerning their soft skills?
2. Do pre-service instructors display noteworthy contrasts in their seen soft skills based on sexual orientation?
3. Do pre-service instructors show critical differences in their seen soft skills based on rank?
4. Does the nature of the major have any effect on how future teachers see their soft skills?

3. METHOD RESEARCH MODEL

This descriptive research adopted a scanning model, which aimed to systematically obtain sufficient information to describe the future teachers' competence in soft skills. These basic psychosocial abilities refer to 'the capacities and traits' that are associated with 'personality, demeanor, and behavior instead of to formal or specialized knowledge' (Greenery & Tilly, 1996, p. 253). These analysts accept that soft skills are a complement to difficult abilities, which allude to an individual's information and occupational aptitudes.

Participants:
The participants in this ponder are planned instructors who are selected from completely different instructor-preparing programs in Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) in Meknes, Morocco, amid the scholastic year 2023-2024. Thus, an add up to of 360 undergrad student-teachers going to this school were chosen to require portion in this quantitative consider (males:160 and females 200).

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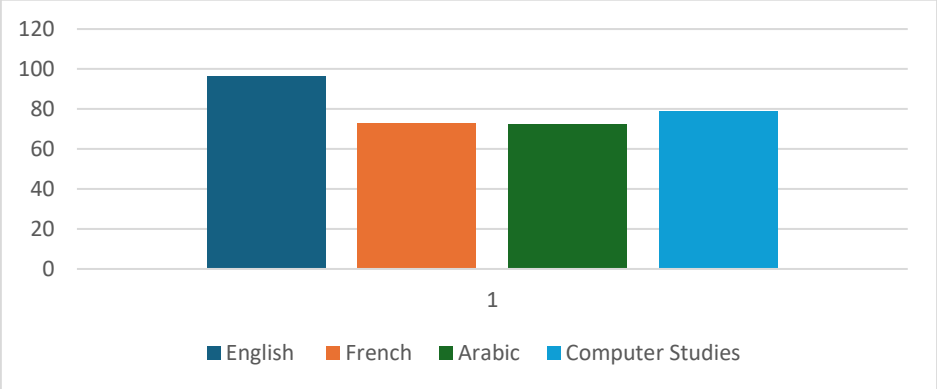


Figure 1: Training programs attended by student-teachers participating in this study.

As portrayed in Figure 1, student-teachers taking portion in this ponder advantage from preparation on how to educate distinctive school subjects after completion of their undergrad instruction. The ampleness of the show test measure was affirmed by the Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin (KMO) degree of test ampleness (.956: past the prescribed esteem of .60) and Barlett's test of sphericity ($p<0.001$).

Pre-service teachers taking portion in this consider extended in age from 18 to 25 a long time ancient, with a cruel of 20, 9. They have selected different levels from first-year recruits to seniors inside four teacher-preparing programs (First-year recruits: 31%, year two/juniors: 32%, and year three/seniors:

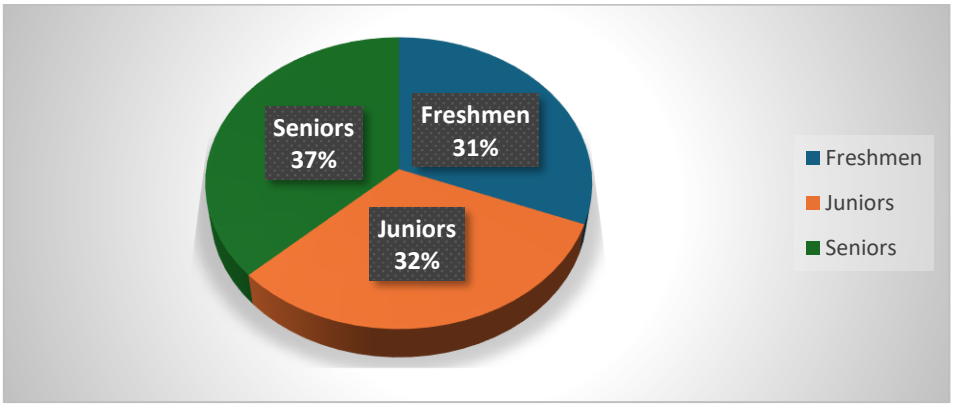


Figure 2: Participants' levels when they took part in this study.

Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

The present research employed electronic means for data collection, utilizing the soft skills study adjusted from the Brookings Soft Skills Report Card (Whitehurst, 2016). The overview comprised of two primary areas:

Demographic Information: This section assembled information on participants' age, sex, major, and scholastic year.

Likert Scale Items: The moment area comprised Likert scale things, with reactions extending

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from 1 = Unequivocally Oppose this idea to 5 =Unequivocally Concur. These things pointed to capture pre-service teachers' self-perceptions of their soft skills over four particular groupings, as sketched out by Whitehurst (2016, p. 4):

Social Skills: This category investigated how understudies associate with their peers, evaluating interpersonal capacities.

Self-Management: Centered on discernible signs of official capacities or self-regulation, showing the student's capacity to require control over programmed responses through arranging, consideration center, reframing encounters, and utilizing mental devices. Academic Social Skills: Enveloped both cognitive and social perspectives, playing a steady part in conventional scholarly assignments, such as the capacity to work freely.

Approaches to Learning: This category dove into perspectives like students' engagement in school, delight of learning, and uneasiness levels related to execution.

Validity and Reliability:
The study ensured the validity of the survey items through a rigorous process. Proficient opinions from two faculty members who are subject matter experts, as well as three Moroccan teachers of English as a Foreign Language were sought. Additionally, a pilot test involving ten student-teachers, who were not part of the actual research, was conducted. The survey, therefore, did not need to undergo any adjustments or refinements since the feedback received from the participants in this pilot phase was positive.
Subsequently, the reliability of the survey instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, with a commendable result of α=0.95. This high alpha coefficient indicates a strong internal consistency among the survey items. Furthermore, the survey demonstrated robust reliability as evidenced by the explanation of 58.9% of the total variance across four distinct scopes. These meticulous steps in ensuring both the reliability and validity of the survey instrument enhance the credibility of the research findings, affirming that the survey accurately and consistently measures the intended constructs. Researchers can have confidence in the integrity of the data collected, providing a solid foundation for the subsequent analyses and interpretations of pre-service teachers' self-perceived soft skills.
By employing statistical techniques in SPSS 21.0, the research sought to unveil patterns, trends, or disparities in how pre-service teachers assessed their soft skills, considering key demographic factors. The subsequent section of the study is dedicated to presenting and discussing the research results, shedding light on any noteworthy findings and implications arising from the quantitative analysis of participant responses. The inclusion of frequency, mean, and standard deviation scores enhances the comprehensiveness of the statistical presentation, offering a detailed insight into the distribution and central tendencies of the data.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

How Future Teachers See Their Soft Skills:
The display considers inspecting the viewpoints of planned instructors concerning their soft skills. The findings uncovered that the members, in common, had positive discernments of their soft skills, adjusting closely with Birrou et al. (2021) discoveries in the past including

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Moroccan instructors. Strikingly, members have shown the next level of certainty in their scholarly social abilities compared to their social abilities, self-management, and approaches to learning. In quintessence, they felt most guaranteed in executing conventional scholarly assignments, taken after by competencies related to official capacities or self-regulation, interpersonal intuition, and school engagement.

This slant may be connected to the nature of their pre-higher instruction and the Moroccan national testing framework, where accomplishing tall scores on standardized exams is pivotal for progressing to prestigious education. Both auxiliary school and college entrance exams essentially survey comprehension abilities through multiple-choice things, putting less accentuation on beneficial abilities like verbal and nonverbal communication, social abilities, and self-management. Even though these last-mentioned abilities are to some degree emphasized in school educational programs, the examination structure tends to prioritize conventional scholarly abilities, possibly impacting understudies to create freedom instead of locking in collaborative exercises that cultivate social and collaborative skills through

How Future Teachers See Their Social Skills:
How members see social skills may well be characterized as tolerably high; in any case, a closer examination of their answers to the postured questions divulged regions where they communicated less certainty in certain social abilities. Particularly, they either opposed this idea or were undecided approximately beginning intelligent with peers (38,8%), driving bunches (20,8%), making unused companions (18,8%), having a sense of humor (19,8%), taking portion in discourses (17,5%), and giving positive criticism to peers (14%). These results raise vital contemplations as they propose that a few members needed certainty in locking in with others at the anticipated level, despite the proficient desire for instructors to be capable in intelligence, especially with their students, guardians, and colleagues.

This reluctance could be the result of the participants' hesitance to connect due to inborn social or initiative-related characteristics. Furthermore, it may be credited to the nonappearance of evaluations or assessments of such competencies amid their enrollment into the programs they are now profiting from. Besides, the reactions infer that a few members may show unseemly social behaviors, such as animosity (23%). This finding is particularly concerning given that instructors are expected to serve as role models for understudies and play a significant part in settling potential clashes among them.

How Future Teachers See Their Self-Management Skills:
Just like the social abilities category, the reactions in this segment show that members have decently positive sees on their self-management skills. Outstandingly, 90%, 84%, and 83% of them detailed that they appear regard to instructors and staff at school, keep up consideration to assignments, and coordinate with others, individually. These figures are promising, adjusting to the anticipated behaviors of instructors. In any case, certain reactions in this category raise concerns, proposing potential challenges in taking care of prodding and social incitements (46%), controlling outrage (43%), reacting in socially fitting ways to feedback from others (21%), compromising with others to dodge conflict (21%), or tolerating and complying true

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blue rules (19%). These discoveries might stem from the nonappearance of assessments on social and associational competencies amid college entrance exams or any tests evaluating mental versatility.

Moving on to the third category of the overview pointed to capturing participants' viewpoints on their scholarly social skills, which are considered supplementary in encouraging conventional scholarly assignments such as autonomous work and the utilization of reasonable ponder abilities. The results for this category uncovered that participants generally held modestly positive sees on their scholarly social abilities. Particularly, 55% and 25,1% of them detailed that they can work freely and tune in to and carry out instructor bearings, individually. However, certain respondents communicated less certainty in angles such as being reliable for school and maintaining a strategic distance from undue unlucky deficiencies (40%), utilizing fitting ponder abilities (41%), inquiring for offer assistance when required, and posturing questions to their teacher/peers (67%), completing assignments on time (19,5%), and bringing required materials to school (46%). In pith, at slightest one out of five pre-service instructors did not feel guaranteed in satisfying their essential responsibilities as understudies. These discoveries raise critical concerns with respect to those who will be teaching future understudies whereas anticipating them to fulfill the duties that they as of now battle with. This moreover prompts questions almost who will expect these obligations before long.
The final category of the overview comprised of things pointed at gathering the points of view of pre-service instructors on their approaches to learning, including viewpoints such as a student's engagement in school, satisfaction of learning, and execution uneasiness. The result of the examination shows that members own less certainty in their approaches to learning compared to their discernment of social abilities, self-management abilities, and scholastic social skills. For illustration, as it were 31% of them detailed feeling on edge and frightful approximately their courses, whereas 46% communicated certainty in working difficult and taking part in extracurricular school exercises. Also, as it were 50% of the members showed that they delighted in school, whereas 39% and 28% did not feel sure in taking on challenging errands and their capacities, separately. These discoveries highlight an undesirable level of uneasiness, particularly inside the learning environment. Moreover, they state that a considerable number of members don't feel joy from their tutoring, which might possibly reduce their inspiration, and sense of school having a place, and adversely affect scholarly progression and accomplishment.

The second research question delved into whether there were noteworthy contrasts in soft skills based on sexual orientation. The results of the autonomous samples t-test showed that there's no noteworthy contrast between female and male pre-service instructors in this respect ($p>0.05$). This particular finding adjusts with those detailed by Çetingöz, and Ekinci-Vural (2011) but contrasts with the discoveries of Bozgün and Pekdoğan (2018).

How Would-Be Teachers See Their Soft Skills Regarding Seniority:
Regarding the third research question, which examined variations in the perception of soft skills with regard to seniority, the findings suggest that the participants' seniority in higher education has an impact on their soft skills. The results of the post-hoc test showed a

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statistically significant difference (p<.05) favoring senior students over sophomore and junior-level students. This result is consistent with the relationship between prospective preschool teachers' soft skills and their enrolled grades reported by Aydoğan and Sezer (2016), as well as the claim made by Bozgün and Pekdoğan (2018) that third-year pre-service teachers possess superior soft skills compared to second-year students. It contradicts, however, Çetinkaya's (2011) findings, which show that freshmen students have better soft skills than senior students. When the three groups are collectively analyzed, it can be concluded that the length of time spent in higher education enhances the soft skills of aspiring teachers. One possible explanation for the first-year students' comparatively higher scores than those of second and third-year students is that the first-year curriculum may be less demanding. Furthermore, these results may have been affected by the recent semester's switch to distance learning due to COVID-19. Some obligations, like being on time, carrying instructional materials, managing difficult assignments, and putting in a lot of effort, might have been made easier by this change. Anxiety may have been reduced in certain in-person classes by distance learning as well. The participants' experience of not facing unpleasant emotions while completing the online assessment and evaluation process, where they had plenty of time to study or answer test questions or prepare assigned projects, might have further reduced test anxiety and upgraded their perceived soft skills.

The final research question examined whether groups differed statistically according to majors. Multiple comparisons of means and analysis of variance were used to compare the groups' perceived soft skill mean scores. The findings indicate that the individuals registered in programs for teaching social sciences, science, and classroom instruction exhibited superior soft skills in comparison to their counterparts in other majors. This disparity may be explained by the multidisciplinary nature of these programs, which include a greater number of practice-based courses that call for collaboration and communication between students. Some programs, on the other hand, might be made for educators who specialize in particular fields and provide more theoretical than practice-based courses.

The science teaching program, for instance, offers practice-based courses in biology, chemistry, and physics, while the social sciences teaching program offers field-specific courses in geography, history, and anthropology. Teaching literacy, mathematics, social sciences, physical education, and drama are just a few of the practice-based and group work-oriented courses that are included in the classroom teaching program. From this angle, the fact that the majority of participants in preschool teacher training programs were freshmen and had not yet taken practice-based, field-specific training courses at the time of data collection can account for their comparatively lower soft skills, even in spite of the programs' multidisciplinary structure and practice-based coursework.

On the other hand, participants who studied teaching mathematics, psychology, Turkish language instruction, and English language instruction showed comparatively fewer soft skills. This observation can be explained by the fact that these majors offer fewer practice-based courses and have a less multidisciplinary structure. These results corroborate a previous finding by Bozgün and Pekdoğan (2018) that pre-service science and classroom teachers typically possess better social skills than their preschool teaching and psychological counseling and guidance program counterparts.

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5. CONCLUSION

The current study's main objectives were to ascertain whether gender, seniority, and major significantly affect pre-service teachers' perceptions of soft skills in Morocco. The results showed that seniority and major had different perceptions of soft skills, and there was no discernible relationship between gender and soft skill perception. In particular, freshmen demonstrated greater confidence in their soft skills than sophomores and juniors, while fourth-year students displayed more positive views than their counterparts in the second and third years. This pattern might be connected to the shift to online learning amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which may ease obligations and lessen the stress that comes with in-person learning. When it came to majors, participants in programs with more practice-based courses and multidisciplinary structures—like teaching science, social sciences, and classrooms—reported much higher soft skills than those offering more theoretical courses without substantial student collaboration.

Pre-service teachers' perceptions of their soft skills were generally positive, but a thorough investigation revealed areas in which different percentages of them expressed less confidence. These domains encompassed communication and cooperation, taking charge of situations, managing taunts and insults, managing temper, being on time, finishing assignments, carrying supplies to class, accepting challenges, and taking part in extracurricular activities.

The study highlights how pre-service teachers' soft skills need to be improved for them to fulfill their potential as future role models. The guidelines for teacher training programs should be revised to assess social and interactional competencies. Participants with lower soft skill levels should be interviewed in a structured manner to identify contributing factors. Seminars and conferences should be held to address obstacles, and the curriculum should include more communicative and practice-based courses. The small sample size and reliance on self-reported perceptions are two of the study's limitations. Future studies could compare pre-service teachers' soft skills across university types, increase the sample size, use a variety of data collection techniques, and look at how actual teaching practices affect the development of soft skills.

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