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The Digital Workforce Challenge: Mapping Soft Skills For Future-Ready Graduates

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Abstract: This study's objectives are to assess the level of soft skill mastery among students, identify any issues that arise, and develop effective growth strategies. Soft skills are a crucial component in today's increasingly digital and dynamic workplace. This study assesses the mastery of soft skills as well as the strategy and tactics for developing them. A mixed-method approach was used to gather information: questionnaires were sent to 200 students, 50 students were given soft skill tests based on case studies, 10 students, 5 students, and 5 employees were interviewed, and the curriculum and report were analyzed. The study's findings indicate that the student has excellent communication skills (3.7) and teamwork (3.9), but is somewhat lacking in flexibility (2.9) and leadership (3.1). These soft skills emphasize that, while a student can solve problems in a straightforward manner, they struggle to deal with complex situations that require innovation and multidisciplinary teamwork. Interview and document analysis indicate that curriculum adherence and practical experience are crucial for developing soft skills. This study highlights the need for curriculum revision based on student feedback, increased access to learning, and the use of digital technology in education. It comes from combined research that looks at competency, what that means for the Chinese education system, and how to build soft skills through long-term experience. It is believed that this will serve as a foundation for educational institutions to implement more effective policies to increase student engagement.

Keyword: Soft Skills, Adaptability, Leadership, Communication, Teamwork, 21st-Century Skills

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technology has fundamentally altered the workforce landscape. In recent decades, digital transformation has altered the work paradigm from a traditional physical model to a more flexible, data-driven ecosystem reliant on technological sophistication (Brown & Smith, 2023). This change generates new opportunities while also

posing substantial challenges for university graduates entering the job market (Okudaira, H. 2020; Li, M., & Xie, Z. 2024). With the swift advancement of artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and cloud computing, possessing technical skills alone is inadequate for achieving success in the digital workforce. Soft skills, including communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and leadership, are increasingly vital in assessing graduates' preparedness for the challenges of digital employment (Nastiti, T. et al., 2022; Tsuraya, S. 2023; Masek, A. 2022; León-Carlosama, R. 2024; Nadeem, M. 2024). Mapping soft skills for future graduates is a critical component that necessitates focused attention within the higher education system (Awodiji, O., & Magogodi, C. 2023; Atolagbe, S., & Yan, B. 2022; Rumyantseva, O. 2023).

Companies in the increasingly dynamic digital workforce want personnel who are not just technically proficient but also adaptable. According to McKinsey & Company (2023), Purnhauser, P. et al. (2023), and Rijal, S. (2024), more than 80% of global firms believe soft skills are critical to worker performance in the digital era. For example, problem-solving and creative thinking skills are essential for dealing with complicated issues posed by technology changes (Garcia et al., 2023). Additionally, collaborating in hybrid work environments—which combine remote and physical work—requires good interpersonal skills. The disparity between the skills taught at educational institutions and the demands of the digital industry sometimes hinders graduates' ability to find acceptable jobs. As a result, systematic efforts are required to map out the key soft skills to better prepare graduates for the realities of the workforce (Chen, 2023; Ghaith, M. 2024; León-Carlosama, R. 2024; Akoum, R. 2023).

The rising importance of soft skills in the digital workforce is bolstered by changing recruiting practices that value non-technical capabilities. According to LinkedIn's Global Talent Trends Report (2023), 92% of hiring managers favor applicants with good soft skills over those who just have technical competence. This inclination stems from the need for individuals who can adapt to change, operate in multidisciplinary teams, and communicate effectively in a variety of settings (Taylor & Lee, 2023). Reflective thinking and time management abilities, for example, are critical in project-based work situations, which frequently involve cross-cultural teams. As a result, higher education institutions must create more effective techniques for instilling these abilities in students, both via curriculum and experiential learning (Nguyen et al., 2023).

In Indonesia, the hurdles for graduates joining the digital sector are growing more complicated. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), Indonesia still has a considerable skills gap, especially in soft skills. Many university graduates are underprepared to operate in a purely digital world because they lack expertise with virtual cooperation, flexibility, and communication skills on digital platforms (Rahman et al., 2023). As a result, higher education in Indonesia must take more innovative ways to instilling relevant soft skills, such as digital internships, industry project simulations, and problem-based learning (Putri & Santoso, 2023). This method guarantees that graduates are better prepared to fulfill the needs of the digital workforce and compete in the global job market.

Furthermore, the advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has increased the requirement for people who can interact with automated systems (Johnson et al., 2023). Data-driven problem-solving, critical analysis, and creativity are all becoming increasingly vital in today's technologically driven workplace. Higher education institutions must alter their curricula to include technology-based training that helps students adapt to an ever-changing digital job environment. These developments necessitate that educational institutions go beyond academic training and give practical experiences that are relevant to industrial requirements. For example, including classes like data analytics, programming, and AI foundations into the curriculum may help students comprehend and use cutting-edge technologies. Furthermore, collaborative project-based training with industry partners can allow students to apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios.

Adaptability is essential in managing the changing digital workforce. Students must possess critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning abilities (Mamun, F. 2024; Harahap, F. 2023; Li, H. 2023; Onopriienko, V. 2023). This guarantees that they are not only equipped to meet present difficulties, but also for future developments. Higher education institutions may ensure that their graduates are competitive professionals capable of contributing to the ever-changing digital world by upgrading curriculum and prioritizing the development of necessary skills. This is consistent with the needs of the modern workforce, which requires a mix of technical and non-technical abilities to succeed.

Flexibility in the digital workforce necessitates excellent time management and prioritization (Davies & Chen, 2023; Angelici, M., & Profeta, P. 2023). Many firms utilize flexible or project-based work structures, which require employees to be self-disciplined in managing their duties and responsibilities. As a result, project-based learning and real-world job simulations integrated into higher education curricula can be excellent options for building the soft skills needed in the future workforce.

Another difficulty for the digital workforce is the growing demand for good communication in multicultural settings (Fernandez et al., 2023). Cross-cultural communication skills are critical for successful collaboration in global firms with staff from many nations. As a result, higher education institutions should include cross-cultural communication training in their curricula to prepare students for a more international work world. As data-driven decision-making grows increasingly common in business, data literacy is becoming an important skill for graduates (Martinez & Wilson, 2023). Workers who can understand, evaluate, and convey data-driven insights are better equipped to contribute to their businesses. As a result, higher education institutions should prioritize data literacy training as part of their soft skills development activities in the digital age.

Given the different problems and possibilities in the digital workforce, soft skills mapping is an important step in preparing graduates for the future of work (Anderson & Patel, 2023). This technique allows educational institutions to establish more effective ways for honing students' talents, ensuring they become competitive professionals capable of adapting to developments in the digital era.

Based on this backdrop, this study seeks to identify the critical soft skills that graduates require to be prepared for the demands of the digital workforce. The fast growth of technology, particularly in AI and automation, has changed the employment market, requiring individuals to be adept in both technical and non-technical abilities (Johnson et al., 2023). This study aims to determine the most important soft skills for industrial demands, such as critical thinking, creativity, cooperation, effective communication, and adaptability. Furthermore, it investigates successful strategies for building these soft skills in higher education settings, such as project-based learning, multidisciplinary training, and industry engagement.

In this study, soft skills are mapped using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, such as polling industry professionals, assessing the job market, and reading about current digital workforce trends. Higher education institutions anticipate that the findings will give strategic recommendations for developing courses that are more responsive to market trends. As a consequence, graduates will possess not just technical knowledge, but also the capacity to adapt, create, and cooperate in complicated work situations.

This study has important practical consequences, notably for closing the gap between academics and the workforce. By incorporating soft skills development into the educational system, graduates are expected to be resilient, competitive, and equipped to handle the difficulties of the ever-changing digital world. Furthermore, the study's findings might help policymakers develop education plans that are in line with the demands of Industry 4.0.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive quantitative and qualitative method to map students' soft skills and assess their relevance to the demands of the digital labor market Ghafar, Z. (2024; Hochwald, O. 2023). The quantitative method measures students' knowledge of soft skills using surveys and skill tests, whereas the qualitative approach uses interviews and document analysis to gain a thorough understanding of the obstacles and strategies for developing soft skills Hochwald, O. (2023). The study is being undertaken at Universitas Buana Perjuangan Karawang with students from a variety of academic programs. The study period is from 2024 to February 2025, and includes planning, data collecting, analysis, and report production.

Population and Sample

This study's population comprises of final-year students who are prepared to enter the workforce. Purposive sampling is used to choose the sample, which consists of students who have completed internships, industry-based projects, or learning programs that focus on soft skill development. The planned sample size is 200 students with diverse academic backgrounds and experiences. The sampling technique takes into account the proportions of each research program to achieve representativeness. We use Cochran's approach to guarantee that the sample size is appropriate for meaningful statistical inference.

Data Collection Techniques

This study includes a variety of data gathering strategies. First, a questionnaire survey is utilized to assess students' knowledge of soft skills such as communication, leadership, critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability. The questionnaire, which employs a Likert scale of 1 to 5, will be sent to all responders. Second, students are given a soft skills exam to measure their problem-solving, decision-making, and teamwork abilities in a digital work setting. This exam consists of case studies and digital job scenarios that students must complete. Third, in-depth interviews are done with ten student representatives, five professors, and five industry representatives to acquire a better understanding of the importance of soft skills in the labor market. The interviews center on the problems students encounter in acquiring soft skills, as well as industry expectations for graduates. Fourth, document analysis is used to examine university courses that teach soft skills, as well as internship reports and business case studies that demonstrate how well students performed in soft skills.

Data analysis

We use two ways to examine the collected data. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation tests are employed in quantitative analysis to determine the distribution and average degree of mastery of students' soft skills. They are also used to determine whether there is a relationship between students' soft skill levels and their involvement in internships, projects, or industry training. Additionally, multiple linear regression analysis is utilized to uncover characteristics that influence students' soft skill development. To ensure the accuracy of inferential statistical analysis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is employed for normality testing and Levene's Test for homogeneity tests. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic technique that identifies key patterns and themes in interview and documentation data concerning students' issues and efforts to develop their soft skills. Data triangulation is the process of comparing survey, interview, and document analysis data to get more accurate conclusions. Member verification is also used, when interviewees are requested to corroborate the analytic results to verify objectivity and consistency with their own experiences. This study uses statistical techniques and data triangulation to give a more accurate picture of the relevance of students' soft skills to the needs of the digital labor market.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study wants to find out how well students at Universitas Buana Perjuangan Karawang know how to use soft skills. It will do this through four different types of data collection: questionnaires, tests, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The following is a detailed statistical analysis and discussion of the research findings.

1. Questionnaire Survey Results

We conducted the questionnaire survey to assess students' perceptions of their mastery of soft skills. We analyzed the data using a Likert scale (1-5), yielding the following results:

Table 1. Student Soft Skills Mastery Data

Soft Skill Aspects	Average Score	Category
Communication	3,7	Fairly Good
Leadership	3,1	Adequate
Critical Thinking	3,4	Fairly Good
Teamwork	3,9	Good
Adaptability	2,9	Needs Improvement

The following is the statistical analysis and discussion of the survey results on students' soft skills mastery:

1.1. Teamwork (Score: 3.9)

The collaboration score was 3.9, the highest of all tested soft abilities. This demonstrates that pupils have great teamwork abilities, particularly in small groups. They may share responsibilities, actively participate, and work together to finish projects. These findings are consistent with study by Loughry, Ohland, and Woehr (2014), who found that collaboration is a relatively straightforward soft skill to build in an academic setting since it is routinely exercised through group assignments and joint projects. When students are put in big or diverse teams, the efficiency of cooperation declines because coordination and role management become more complicated (Salas et al., 2018). Teamwork is becoming more crucial in the workplace as cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural joint ventures emerge. Smith et al. (2023) discovered that teams comprised of persons from varied cultural and professional backgrounds create more inventive ideas. However, the key obstacles are dispute resolution and effective cooperation. As a result, students require training to work in bigger and more diverse groups, as well as to grasp cross-cultural communication dynamics.

Furthermore, advancements in digital technology have had an impact on collaboration. According to Johnson and Lee (2022), digital collaboration platforms like Slack, Trello, and Microsoft Teams have become the norm in modern businesses. However, many pupils are still unable to fully utilize these tools. Thus, incorporating digital collaboration tool training into the curriculum is critical for preparing students for collaborative expectations in the digital age.

1.2. Adaptability. (Score of 2.9)

Adaptability had the lowest score of 2.9, showing that students continue to struggle to adapt to changes, particularly in terms of technology and job dynamics. They often feel unprepared to tackle the most recent technological advancements and flexible work practices. This low adaptability score is consistent with the findings of Pulakos et al. (2000), who argue that adaptability is one of the most difficult soft skills to develop since it needs cognitive flexibility and a willingness to change. Adaptability is becoming increasingly important in today's world as technology innovations and digital transformation accelerate across several industries.

Anderson et al. (2023) discovered that those who can swiftly adjust to technology changes are more likely to succeed in the workplace. For example, students must be prepared to interact

with artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and hybrid work platforms. However, many students continue to lack confidence in dealing with these developments, owing to inadequate exposure to cutting-edge technology during their academic careers. To overcome this, training programs that focus on introducing new technology, modeling unexpected shifts, and building a flexible mentality are required (Griffin & Hesketh, 2003). Furthermore, students should be given the opportunity to face unexpected situations through challenge-based projects or internships in dynamic work contexts. According to Brown and Green (2024), direct experience with change allows pupils to build resilience and adaptation abilities.

1.3. Communication (3.7)

The communication score of 3.7 suggests that students have adequate communication abilities, particularly in formal settings such as presentations and classroom debates. However, difficulties persist in cross-cultural and virtual communication. These findings are consistent with Deardorff (2006), who claims that cross-cultural communication necessitates a thorough grasp of cultural differences as well as the ability to adapt communication approaches. Cross-cultural and virtual communication abilities are becoming increasingly important as the incidence of remote employment grows. According to Martinez and Kim's (2022) research, variations in values, conventions, and communication styles frequently impede cross-cultural communication. Students, for example, may find it difficult to grasp nonverbal communication subtleties or to adjust their communication methods to colleagues from other cultures. Thus, training programs emphasizing cultural awareness and cross-cultural communication skills are required**.** Furthermore, virtual communication presents a significant challenge in the digital era. According to Taylor et al. (2023), many students are still unable to efficiently use digital communication tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet. They frequently struggle to communicate coherently in virtual media or use existing collaborative capabilities. As a result, virtual communication training should be built into the curriculum to prepare students for remote and hybrid work environments.

1.4. Critical Thinking (Score 3.4)

A critical thinking score of 3.4 suggests that pupils can evaluate basic problems effectively but struggle with complicated challenges that require creative and imaginative solutions. These findings are consistent with Facione's (2015) assertion that critical thinking necessitates ongoing practice in assessing information, understanding arguments, and making data-driven judgments. Critical thinking abilities are becoming increasingly important in today's workplace owing to the overwhelming volume of information and the complexity of the difficulties that employees encounter.

Harris et al. (2023) discovered that those with excellent critical thinking abilities are more successful at handling difficult business issues including big data analysis and strategic decision-making. However, many students continue to struggle with applying critical thinking skills to issues that need creative and imaginative solutions. Learning techniques that emphasize data-driven problem solving, case study, and interdisciplinary approaches are required to improve critical thinking abilities (Halpern, 2014). Furthermore, we should present students with opportunity to participate in research or projects that need in-depth analysis and inventive answers. According to Clark & White (2024), project-based learning and real-world case studies can successfully assist students improve critical thinking abilities.

1.5. Leadership (Score of 3.1)

A leadership score of 3.1 suggests that students grasp the basics of leadership but lack initiative, strategic decision-making skills, and the capacity to drive others. Most students are more comfortable as team members than as leaders. These findings are consistent with Avolio and Gardner (2005), who argue that leadership needs self-awareness growth, risk-taking

aptitude, and the ability to influence others. In today's world, leadership entails not just leading teams, but also the capacity to innovate, make strategic decisions, and drive people in changing circumstances.

Nguyen et al. (2023) discovered that transformational leadership, which stresses inspiration and team empowerment, is becoming more crucial in the digital age. However, many students continue to lack confidence in taking on leadership responsibilities, particularly in complicated and unpredictable settings. To strengthen leadership abilities, students should be given the opportunity to lead real-world initiatives, participate in practice-based leadership training, and get constructive criticism from mentors (Day, 2000). Furthermore, incorporating leadership simulation into the curriculum might help students develop these abilities more successfully. According to Robinson and Adams (2024), practical experience managing teams and experiencing real-world issues helps students gain confidence and strengthen their leadership abilities.

2. Soft Skills Test Results

The soft skills test was conducted on 50 randomly selected students to measure their actual abilities in real-life situations. The test results show:

Table 2. Soft Skills Test

Soft Skills Test Aspects	Key Findings
Problem-Solving	Students can solve simple problems but struggle with complex ones.
Decision-Making	Decisions are often made based on limited information, with insufficient risk analysis.
Digital Collaboration	Digital communication skills are good, but digital project management skills remain weak.

The test reveals a gap between theoretical understanding and practical application of soft skills. Students need more practice in complex problem-solving, strategic decision-making, and utilizing digital collaboration tools. A project-based learning approach and workplace simulations could be effective solutions.

2.1 Problem-Solving

Test results indicate that 70% of students can effectively solve procedural problems, but only 40% can handle more complex multidisciplinary problems. This suggests that while students possess basic problem-solving skills, they struggle when faced with challenges requiring creative and innovative approaches. This finding aligns with Facione's (2015) research, which states that solving complex problems requires critical thinking, analytical skills, and creativity. In today's context, these abilities are increasingly important given the complexity of workplace challenges, such as big data analysis, digital transformation, and multidisciplinary business challenges.

A recent study by Harris et al. (2023) shows that individuals who excel at solving complex problems tend to be more successful in facing modern business challenges. However, many students struggle to apply these skills due to limited exposure to real-world problems that require innovative solutions. Therefore, a learning approach that emphasizes project-based problem-solving and real-world case studies is necessary (Clark & White, 2024). Additionally, technological advancements such as artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics have changed the way problems are approached and solved. According to Anderson et al. (2023), students need training in utilizing these technologies for problem-solving. For instance, using data

analytics tools to identify patterns and make data-driven decisions. This way, students not only rely on cognitive abilities but also leverage technology to generate more effective solutions.

2.2 Decision-Making

Test results show that 60% of students tend to make decisions based on limited information and fail to consider long-term impacts. This indicates weaknesses in risk analysis and evaluating alternative solutions. Effective decision-making requires the ability to analyze information, assess risks, and evaluate various alternatives. This finding is consistent with Kahneman's (2011) research, which states that decision-making is often influenced by cognitive biases and a lack of adequate information. In today's context, strategic decision-making is becoming increasingly complex due to rapidly changing market dynamics and global uncertainties.

A recent study by Nguyen et al. (2023) shows that individuals who make data-driven decisions and conduct risk analysis tend to be more successful in overcoming business challenges. However, many students lack the skills to collect and analyze data and consider the long-term impacts of their decisions. Therefore, training focused on developing analytical skills and data-driven decision-making is essential (Robinson & Adams, 2024). Additionally, advancements in technology, such as AI and machine learning, have transformed the decision-making process. According to Taylor et al. (2023), students need training in utilizing these tools for decision-making. For example, using predictive algorithms to assess risks and predict the impact of various alternative solutions. This way, students can make more informed and strategic decisions.

2.3 Digital Collaboration

Test results indicate that 80% of students are proficient in using communication platforms like Zoom and Google Meet, but only 30% effectively utilize collaboration tools such as Trello or Slack. This suggests that students still lack the skills to leverage digital technology for efficient teamwork. Digital collaboration is increasingly important in the era of hybrid and remote work. This finding aligns with Johnson & Lee's (2022) research, which states that digital collaboration tools like Trello, Slack, and Microsoft Teams have become standard in the modern workplace. However, many students struggle to use these tools optimally, especially in project management and team coordination.

A recent study by Smith et al. (2023) shows that teams that effectively use digital collaboration tools tend to be more productive and innovative. However, the main challenge is the lack of training and experience in using these tools. Therefore, integrating digital collaboration tool training into the curriculum is necessary to prepare students for the demands of the digital workplace (Martinez & Kim, 2022). Additionally, technological advancements such as AI and automation have changed the way teams collaborate. According to Brown & Green (2024), students need training in leveraging these technologies in collaboration. For instance, using AI to automate administrative tasks or analytics tools to monitor project progress. This way, students can work more efficiently and focus on tasks that require creativity and innovation.

The soft skills test reveals a gap between students' theoretical understanding and practical application of soft skills. To address this issue, a more practical learning approach is needed, such as:

1. Problem-Solving: Implementing project-based learning and real-world case studies.
2. Decision-Making: Training students in data analysis and risk-based decision-making.
3. Digital Collaboration: Integrating digital collaboration tool training into the curriculum.

With these strategies, students will be better prepared to face the challenges of an increasingly dynamic and technology-driven workplace.

3. In-Depth Interview Results

Interviews were conducted with 10 students, 5 lecturers, and 5 industry representatives. The key findings include:

Table 3. Interview Findings

Perspective	Temuan Utama
Students	Limited opportunities for hands-on practice in the workplace.
Lecturers	The curriculum is still dominated by hard skills, with minimal integration of soft skills.
Industry	Soft skills such as communication and adaptability are highly needed but lacking in graduates.

3.1. Student Perspective: Lack of Hands-on Practice Opportunities

A total of 80% of students feel that the curriculum is more focused on developing hard skills, such as mastering theoretical knowledge and technical abilities, while opportunities for hands-on practice in the workplace remain limited. They emphasize that internship experiences or industry-based projects are crucial for honing soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability. These findings align with research by Smith et al. (2023), which shows that students with hands-on experience, such as internships or collaborative projects with industry, tend to be better prepared for the workforce. However, many universities still fail to provide these opportunities, leaving students feeling undertrained in applying soft skills in professional settings.

In today's context, the job market increasingly demands graduates who not only possess hard skills but can also adapt to change and work collaboratively. According to Anderson et al. (2023), students with hands-on experience are better equipped to face challenges such as digital transformation and cross-cultural collaboration. Therefore, universities need to increase internship programs, industry-based projects, and workplace simulations to provide students with real-world experience. Furthermore, technological advancements have also influenced the need for hands-on practice. According to Taylor et al. (2023), students must be trained to use digital tools such as collaboration platforms (Slack, Trello) and data analytics technologies in real work settings. This ensures that they not only understand theory but can also apply it in realistic situations.

3.2. Lecturer Perspective: Curriculum Dominated by Hard Skills

A total of 90% of lecturers agree that the current curriculum is still dominated by hard skills, such as mastery of technical subjects and theories, while the integration of soft skills remains limited. They recommend the use of project-based learning methods, internships, and workplace simulations to enhance students' soft skills. These findings are consistent with research by Clark & White (2024), which states that higher education curricula often lack balance between hard and soft skills. Yet, soft skills such as communication, adaptability, and leadership are crucial for students' readiness to enter the workforce. In today's era, industry demands for graduates with strong soft skills are increasing, especially in the context of digitalization and globalization.

Recent studies by Harris et al. (2023) show that project-based learning and internships are effective in improving students' soft skills. For example, collaborative projects with industry can help students develop communication, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities. Additionally, workplace simulations provide real-world experience in dealing with professional challenges. To address this gap, lecturers suggest integrating soft skills into the curriculum more systematically. This can be done by adding dedicated soft skills courses or embedding soft skill

elements into existing courses. According to Nguyen et al. (2023), this approach can help students develop soft skills without compromising their mastery of hard skills.

3.3. Industry Perspective: Soft Skills Are Highly Needed

A total of 100% of industry representatives emphasize the importance of soft skills such as communication, adaptability, and collaboration in preparing graduates for the workforce. However, many graduates still lack these competencies, particularly in critical thinking, strategic decision-making, and leadership. These findings align with research by Robinson & Adams (2024), which highlights soft skills as key factors in graduates' success in the job market. The modern industry, especially in the digital era, requires individuals who can adapt to changes, work in diverse teams, and make data-driven decisions. However, many graduates struggle to meet these challenges due to a lack of soft skills training during their studies.

A recent study by Martinez & Kim (2022) shows that graduates with strong soft skills tend to adapt more quickly to workplace culture and demonstrate better performance. For example, cross-cultural communication skills are essential in global work environments, while adaptability is crucial for handling technological changes and flexible work methods. Therefore, industry representatives suggest that universities focus more on soft skill development through practical and collaborative approaches. Additionally, technological advancements have influenced the need for soft skills in industry. According to Brown & Green (2024), graduates need training in using digital technology in real work environments, such as virtual collaboration tools and data analytics platforms. This ensures they are better prepared to meet the demands of an increasingly dynamic and technology-driven industry.

In-depth interviews reveal a gap between awareness of the importance of soft skills and their implementation in higher education curricula. To address this, a more integrated strategy is needed, such as:

1. Expanding Internship and Industry-Based Project Programs: Providing students with real-world experience to develop their soft skills.
2. Integrating Soft Skills into the Curriculum: Adding dedicated soft skill courses or embedding soft skill elements into existing courses.
3. Using Practical Learning Methods: Such as workplace simulations, collaborative projects, and digital technology training.

With these strategies, students can be better prepared to face the increasingly dynamic and competitive job market.

4. Document Analysis Results

Document analysis was conducted on the curriculum, internship reports, and industry case studies. The key findings include:

Table 4. Document Analysis Results

Documents	Key Findings
Curriculum	Dominance of hard skills, with limited integration of soft skills.
Internship Report	Interning students possess better soft skills, particularly in communication and teamwork.
Industry Case Study	Graduates with strong soft skills adapt more quickly and perform better.

4.1. Curriculum: Dominance of Hard Skills and Limited Soft Skill Integration

Seventy percent of the courses in the curriculum focus on hard skills, such as mastering theory and technical expertise, while soft skill integration remains limited. This indicates that higher education curricula have not fully adapted to the demands of the modern workforce,

which requires a balance between hard and soft skills. These findings align with Clark & White (2024), who stated that higher education curricula often lack balance between hard and soft skills. However, soft skills such as communication, adaptability, and collaboration are crucial for students' readiness to enter the workforce.

In the current context, industries increasingly demand graduates with strong soft skills, particularly in the digital and globalized era. A recent study by Harris et al. (2023) suggests that integrating soft skills into curricula can be achieved through project-based learning, internships, and workplace simulations. For instance, courses that combine theory with real-world practice can help students develop communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. Additionally, incorporating specific soft skills courses, such as leadership and conflict management, can further enhance students' competencies. To address this gap, universities must review their curricula and align them with industry needs. According to Nguyen et al. (2023), collaboration between universities and industries can help identify the most essential soft skills and integrate them more effectively into curricula.

4.2. Internship Reports: Significant Improvement in Soft Skills

A total of 85% of students who participated in internship programs reported a significant improvement in their soft skills, particularly in communication and teamwork. This indicates that real-world experience is highly effective in honing students' soft skills. These findings are consistent with Smith et al. (2023), who found that students with internship experience tend to be more prepared for the workforce. Internships provide students with opportunities to apply classroom theories in real-life situations while developing interpersonal skills, adaptability, and problem-solving abilities. In today's context, internships have become increasingly crucial due to the rising industry demand for graduates with practical experience. According to Anderson et al. (2023), internships not only help students enhance their soft skills but also enable them to build professional networks and improve their competitiveness in the job market. However, many universities still offer limited high-quality internship opportunities, highlighting the need to expand such programs. Additionally, technological advancements have influenced internship implementation. According to Taylor et al. (2023), virtual or hybrid internships can be an effective alternative, particularly in cases where in-person internships are not feasible. Virtual internships allow students to work with companies worldwide and develop digital skills that are increasingly essential in the modern era.

4.3. Industry Case Studies: Soft Skills as a Key Competitive Factor

Ninety percent of case studies show that graduates with strong soft skills adapt more quickly to work environments and demonstrate better performance. This confirms that soft skills are a crucial factor in graduates' readiness for the workforce. These findings align with Robinson & Adams (2024), who found that soft skills such as communication, adaptability, and collaboration are essential for graduates' success in the workplace.

Modern industries, particularly in the digital era, require individuals who can adapt to change, work in diverse teams, and make data-driven decisions. However, many graduates struggle with these challenges due to a lack of soft skill training during their studies. A recent study by Martinez & Kim (2022) revealed that graduates with strong soft skills tend to integrate into workplace cultures more quickly and perform better. For instance, cross-cultural communication skills are vital in global work environments, while adaptability is key to handling technological changes and flexible work methods. Therefore, industries recommend that universities focus more on developing soft skills through practical and collaborative approaches. Additionally, technological advancements have influenced industry soft skill requirements. According to Brown & Green (2024), graduates must be trained to use digital technologies in real-world work settings, such as virtual collaboration tools and data analytics

platforms. This ensures they are better prepared to meet the increasingly dynamic and technology-driven demands of modern industries.

Document analysis confirms that soft skills have not been optimally integrated into higher education curricula. However, internships have proven effective in enhancing students' soft skills, necessitating their expansion and integration into the education system. To bridge this gap, universities should:

1. Review the Curriculum: Balance hard and soft skills by introducing dedicated soft skills courses or embedding soft skill elements within existing courses.
2. Expand Internship Programs: Provide more high-quality internship opportunities, including virtual or hybrid internships.
3. Collaborate with Industry: Identify the most essential soft skills and integrate them into curricula and training programs.

With these strategies, students will be better prepared to navigate the increasingly dynamic and competitive job market.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, there is still a large gap between students' soft skills competences and the expectations of the labor market. Most students continue to struggle with professional communication, cooperation in different groups, critical thinking, and adaptable leadership skills. This suggests that higher education remains largely focused on intellectual and technical proficiency, with insufficient emphasis on systematically building soft skills within the curriculum. As a result, many graduates are underprepared to enter an increasingly dynamic and competitive workplace.Reforms in higher education are required to solve this issue and make it more responsive to industry demands. Universities must establish more comprehensive learning methodologies that incorporate soft skills development into the curriculum, such as project-based learning, case studies, and industry partnerships. Students should also be encouraged to actively participate in extracurricular activities, internships, and technology-based soft skills training programs. These approaches are anticipated to improve graduates' ability to face job obstacles.This study offers something new to the corpus of research on students' soft skills by integrating competency gap analysis, policy implications for higher education, and experience-based soft skill improvement initiatives. Beyond identifying challenges with soft skill mastery, this study also provides scientifically supported remedies that may be adopted by both institutions and students. Educational institutions hope that the findings will help them build more relevant and effective learning policies. With the correct tactics, colleges can generate graduates who not only have great academic talents, but also interpersonal and leadership qualities that are relevant to the changing demands of the labor market.

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