



High School Students' Perception and Development of Soft skills

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Abstract

Developing soft skills has become as necessary as hard skills for 21st century EFL learners. Thus, the integration of soft skills teaching and learning in the EFL classroom in the Moroccan high schools is very important. It is claimed that graduates and students lack the necessary soft skills due to the ineffectiveness of the contemporary educational systems that somehow fail to equip students with the necessary soft skills. These systems focus more on equipping students with hard skills. It is said that the lack of soft skills is evident and it results in a big skill mismatch between what students and graduates have and what employers need. Thus, the main objectives of this study are to investigate the extent to which high school students are aware of the importance of soft skills and to explore their favorite methods and school subjects for soft skills development. It also attempts to test the 2nd year baccalaureate students' development of soft skills. This study used a quantitative methodology to collect numerical data and answer the main questions. The study employed a questionnaire as a tool to gather data. The participants are one hundred students from five high schools in the region of Marrakech-Safi. The results revealed that the majority of high school students aren't aware of the importance of soft skills. Besides, the majority of students preferred learning soft skills in the language school subjects through education technology. Another important finding is that students' performance in soft skills is not satisfactory.

1. INTRODUCTION

Schools and other education institutions have an essential mission: to generate knowledge and prepare students to be good citizens and successful workers who respond to the demands of the job market. In other words, these institutions are in charge of providing students and graduates

with the hard and soft skills required for personal and professional development. Soft skills teaching and learning in the Moroccan high schools has become an urgent need. Furthermore, it is more important than ever for teachers to assist students in becoming aware of the value of soft skills and developing them. "Soft skills provide students with a solid conceptual and practical framework for team building, development, and management." It contributes significantly to overall personality development and thus improves the student's career prospects" Balaji and Somashekar (2009). It increases their chances of finding work after graduation. However, the emphasis in the Moroccan educational institutions is still focusing on providing students with technical skills.

It is agreed upon that the teaching and learning of soft skills has become a crucial element in all levels of education mainly in secondary and post-secondary levels. Soft skills have been defined by many scholars in different ways. Amanda (2014) said that soft skills are hard to measure on a resume, while hard skills are easily measured. Soft skills are personal traits that enhance an individual's interactions, job performance and professional life which are unlike hard skills, which are about a person's physical abilities set and ability to perform a certain type of task or activity (Amanda 2014). Soft skills involve much more than personality, including traits like communicating with others; planning and organizing ; taking initiative and leading; managing time; influencing and collaborating on technical and non-technical issues with all types of people; speaking confidently in public; dealing with changing circumstances; autonomous learning; etc (Amanda 2014). Soft skills have also other names like non-cognitive, personal, essential, employability, or 21st century skills (Isaacs, 2016; Robles, 2012). However, the most used definition is that soft skills are any non-technical skill or ability needed for success in work. Isaacs (2016) listed many skills like adaptability, critical thinking, empathy, integrity, optimism, problem solving, decision making, goal setting, self-advocacy, proactivity, resilience , teamwork, self-motivation, communication, positive attitude, leadership, independence, self-regulation, creativity, time management, organization, professionalism in dress, work ethic, and punctuality .

Soft skills are becoming increasingly important in the job market, and Morocco's educational system should incorporate them into high schools. In order to develop students' soft skills at the secondary, middle, and high school levels, the Ministry of Education launched a UNICEF project called 'MAHARTI' in 2021. This program aimed to accomplish two goals: to introduce teachers to various creative approaches and methods for acquiring soft skills, and to develop soft skills in school clubs and outdoor activities. The overall aim was to empower students with soft skills and values that can help them succeed in their studies and get integrated into the social and professional life. The training was launched by the Ministry of Education through a digital platform called taalimtice.ma during the pandemic covid-19. According to the project, soft skills are integrated or embedded into different school subjects (Zemrani, Ezzahiri, 2021).

Thus, the education authorities should encourage teachers to help their students develop their soft skills through different activities. High school students should own soft skills which can be developed over time to help them meet their future needs. Researchers found out that the language classrooms are the most suitable environment for nurturing and instilling these skills through different methods and approaches. They found that learning a foreign language improves one's creativity and other soft skills, and, contrariwise, the incorporation of creativity

High School Students' Perception and Development of Soft skills

increases students' language skills proficiency. Ghonsooly and Shoghi (2012) concluded in a study that the performance of the advanced EFL learners in the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking were significantly higher than the performance of monolingual students. Consequently, EFL learners have a high chance to develop their soft skills. In this regard, it is going to be of great importance and appreciation if teachers help instilling these skills in students using educational technology because of its great benefits on the learning in general.

In fact there aren't many studies or research that investigated the teaching and learning of soft skills in high schools in Morocco. Consequently, the paucity of the literature in this regard led to the conduction of this study in order to find out if these students are aware of the necessity of owning and developing soft skills and what are the methods and the school subjects that high school students prefer for soft skills' development. Besides, this study tried to measure the 2nd year baccalaureate level in soft skills.

2. Literature Review

It is generally agreed on that the teaching and learning of soft skills has become a crucial element in all levels of education and mainly in secondary and post-secondary levels. However, different scholars and researchers suggested some methods and techniques for soft skills' development. This part of the literature review of this study is going to present and discuss some techniques and methods for teaching and learning soft skills.

Teaching soft skills isn't an easy task as it may appear. It necessitates that teachers be imaginative and creative. Although it might be challenging to evaluate and teach soft skills performance effectively, teachers should put tremendous effort into class planning and preparation. Teachers must possess soft skills in order to teach them, as well as the ability to integrate this topic into any other subject they are instructing. Esa, Padil, Selamat, and Idris (2015) claimed that one of the challenges to teaching and developing soft skills among students is teachers' lack of appropriate information in this area. Teachers training institutions can help in this regard by providing continuous training for novice and experienced teachers about the recent methods of teaching. Teachers should also be innovative in integrating traditional methods of teaching and learning with technology, not only to help the teaching and learning process but also to contribute to enhancing soft skills among students (Pineteh, 2012).

Hassan and Maharoff (2014) stated that although there is much interest in investing in soft skills, there is still no agreement on how soft skills can be "understood, defined, used, taught, and assessed in the education field" (p. 84). Also, they agreed with the belief that training works best when it is applied to real-world situations. Moreover, Hassan et al. (2014) stated that before being able to teach soft skills to students, teachers must first recognize and embrace the fact that they must develop their own soft skills. In this regard, teachers ought to receive training on how to transmit soft skills to students. Hassan et al. (2014) came to the conclusion that teachers should attend courses about soft skills in order to master them. They should learn the guidelines on how to embed soft skills in any course, and learn how to assess soft skills appropriately.

It is a part of teachers' professional development to make an effort so as to develop their teaching competencies and update them. They need to have access to different methods and

approaches so that they can be in a better position to teach and assist students in acquiring and developing soft skills. Gunersel and Etienne (2014) found that teachers who received training programs were motivated to include the new teaching methods in their classes. These teachers should also face the dilemma of discarding old teaching methods by adopting new strategies and methodologies. In conclusion, researchers have proposed some useful pedagogical approaches and techniques that can help the teaching and learning of soft skills. The next section is going to present some useful methodologies and techniques to teach soft skills.

Researchers have suggested some techniques and methods to teach soft skills namely cooperative learning (Zhang 2012, Tagg 2003, Tlhoale et al. 2016), workplace simulations practices (Talavera et al. 2007), task-based learning (Stanley, 2003; Willis, 1996), debate and public speaking (Aclan et al., 2016), and the use of edtech like social media (Ismail, 2019 ; Hamat et al., 2012). To begin with, cooperative learning is considered to be an efficient method for teaching and nurturing soft skills like communication, teamwork, leadership, and analytical skills. Teachers are beginning to shift their pedagogy from a passive to an active one, in which students are an integral part of the learning process. Students who learn through passive learning have no say in the design or delivery of their learning experience. Students, on the other hand, participate in the learning experience and are fully responsible for their learning in the active learning pedagogy (Zhang 2012).

Cooperative learning, according to Tagg (2003), is one of the approaches that provide profound learning, which is learning that occurs as a result of the understanding process that we use to define ourselves, other people, and the world. It is a technique that requires group identification and teamwork. Because students participate actively in their learning, this method provides excellent opportunities for soft skills training and development. This type of learning allows students to develop social skills and learn new concepts by exchanging ideas with their classmates and team members. Furthermore, it aids in the effective development of knowledge and the understanding of a topic when looking for an explanation to a task (Tlhoale et al. 2016).

Generally speaking, this style of learning, which demands a lot of social interaction, is one of the finest strategies for assisting students in developing soft skills. However, for this strategy to be effective, teachers must organize cooperative learning in advance, take into account cooperative learning's fundamentals, and make sure there is a strategy in place for the teamwork conversations.

Secondly, simulation learning or real life scenarios practices are good for soft skills development. According to Talavera et al. (2007), participating in on-site training gives students and recent graduates of vocational training a fantastic opportunity to gain practical knowledge and to improve their soft skills. These three key traits must be met for this form of learning to be real and authentic. First of all, it needs to combine organized, coherent experience with the particular skills that need to be developed and taught. Second, it promotes thought and analysis over experience. Lastly, it makes it easier for experience to be incorporated through self-evaluation, results analysis, and the application of newly acquired abilities to actual contexts and circumstances.

Dawe (2002) carried out many case studies about the integration of soft skills development and training. He suggested different learning strategies to enhance soft skills in employees like

High School Students' Perception and Development of Soft skills

one-to-one or small group training, learning guides, mentoring or coaching, recording difficulties and successes, learning teams, formal training sessions, discussion groups or meetings, and self-directed learning activities.

Adding to what is mentioned above; teachers can also implement the techniques of debate and public speaking so as to enhance students' soft skills. Debate is a good educational technique that helps in the development of students' communication and argumentation skills. To accomplish the desired outcomes of the teaching and learning process, teachers should make effective use of it (Aclan et al., 2016).

Beside debate, teachers can make use of public speaking in order to develop students' communication skills. Because public speaking demands a special set of communication abilities, it sets itself apart from other types of communication. People must be able to speak confidently, clearly, and logically while under the added pressure of having others listening to them when they speak in front of them. An effective public speaker understands their audience and how to communicate to them. For instance, while speaking to a group of highly technical audience, they utilize language that they are familiar with. To suit the audience, the language can be technical with a focus on procedures created to address organizational problems. However, they might need to use less technical jargon and concentrate more attentively on the solutions that were produced and how the organization profited from them for a business-oriented audience.

Another method that EFL teachers can implement to foster soft skills is task-based language learning. Task-based language learning (TBLL) is a method that emphasizes on the learning of languages skills via tasks performed by students (Stanley, 2003; Willis, 1996). According to Nunan (1989, p. 10), a task is "A piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form". According to the input hypothesis of Krashen's main claim is that acquisition may be facilitated by the amount of comprehensible input and interaction (Krashen, 1985). Students can engage, work together, and debate meaning and problems while completing a task. Assignments give learners the chance to improve soft skills including communication and analytical abilities.

Finally, teachers can make use of education technology and basically social media in order to help students develop soft skills. Students nowadays are heavily dependent on social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Snapchat. Students can use this type of media to share and discuss their concerns and opinions online. They can also create content and share it with the rest of the world. Many students in Morocco and around the world create content and sell it on various social media platforms. Therefore, teachers can make use of social media creatively and wisely so as to make their teaching material interesting and authentic. Additionally, these devices will support teachers in keeping students engaged in their work and prepared to learn. Likewise, these technology tools allow teachers to communicate with their students outside the classroom boundaries. Students who are timid, hesitant, or introverted can participate in class discussions successfully thanks to social media. So, via the usage of social media, students acquire the most essential skills, namely communication ones (Ismail, 2019).

According to Hamat et al. (2012), through social media people all over the world stayed connected and they shared information and news. As a result, social media allows students to

improve their communication skills while also providing numerous opportunities for them to seek information and entertain themselves. Furthermore, teachers can use social media to encourage students with entrepreneurial traits to find good networking in order to market their products or inventions through social media. Social media also improves students' collaboration and teamwork skills by allowing students to work together and provide feedback to each other. Furthermore, teachers should encourage and allow students to work on their projects while providing guidance via video conferences, allowing for greater creativity and adequate time outside of the classroom setting. In general, social media is a great technological invention that has many advantages and can have a positive influence on students' development of soft skills. Social media allows teachers and students to communicate outside of the classroom boundaries in a low-anxiety environment. It provides a good virtual environment in which all types of students can participate in the learning process. Furthermore, students can improve their time management skills by keeping track of the deadlines for their tasks (Ismail, 2019).

3. Methodology

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the 2nd year baccalaureate students' perception of the importance of soft skills. It also aimed to measure their soft skills level in the four main skills: communication, teamwork, problem-solving and leadership. Besides, it intended to explore their favorite methods and their preferred school subjects for the improvement of soft skills. A questionnaire was used as the main tool for collecting data and about 100 second year baccalaureate students from five public high schools in the region of Marrakesh-Safi participated in this study.

The participants were contacted via their English language teachers in order to participate in this study. The questionnaire was sent to few students through different technology tools like WhatsApp, emails, Messenger and the majority of students got the questionnaire as a hard copy due to some technical issues. A clear strategy was followed in this study. Basically, five high schools were visited and a meeting was scheduled with some EFL teachers who volunteered to help in the gathering of data. After collecting the numerical data, each question was analyzed separately. The ethical side was also given attention in this research by giving students and teachers the chance to quit at any time. This research was just an attempt and the students' level and awareness of the importance of soft skills needs to be studied deeper in all the regions of Morocco so as to have a big image.

So as to satisfy the objectives of this research paper, a quantitative research was held. The aim was to visit different classes in different high schools, to gather data, to classify features, count them, and constructs statistical models in an attempt to explain what was observed. Besides, all questions of the questionnaire were carefully designed before data was collected. So a quantitative data was more efficient because it enabled to answer the main questions of this study which were:

- 1- To what extent the 2nd year baccalaureate students were aware of the importance of soft skills?

High School Students' Perception and Development of Soft skills

- 2- What are the students' favorite methods and school subjects for the improvement of soft skills?
- 3- What is the performance of the 2nd year baccalaureate students in the communication, teamwork, problem-solving and leadership skills?

3.1 Research approach

The research approach that was followed for the purpose of this study was the inductive one. According to this approach, the study began with raising specific questions, which were used to produce generalized theories and conclusions drawn from the study. The reason for occupying the inductive approach was that it was the most appropriate one for small samples to collect data. However, the main weakness of the inductive approach was that it produced generalized theories and conclusions based only on a small number of observations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

To answer the questions raised in this study, I administrated about 100 questionnaires to five 2nd year baccalaureate classes in different high schools. Among the five schools selected to participate in this study, there were two schools located in a rural area. Another thing to mention was that the teachers of all classes helped their students while filling in the questionnaire by explaining or translating some words.

3.2 Participants

Basically, 100 students from five public high schools were used as samples to participate in this study. These schools were randomly selected. To begin with, these participants were consulted to participate in this study by their will and they were given the chance to withdraw at any time. The chosen classes were mixed ones of both boys and girls. They included few repeated students. Few students indicated that they took evening classes in the English school subject. However, this is limited to few cases and it didn't affect the results of this study.

3.3 Tools

In order to collect a quantitative data, a questionnaire (online and hard copies) was used as the main tool in this study for data collection. However, some students got the questionnaire as a hard copy due to technical issues. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section was for gathering some general information about the participants like gender, grade of school, type of school, etc. The second section was dedicated to explore the extent to which students were aware of the importance of soft skills and their favorite techniques and the preferred school subjects for the development of soft skills. The third section was devoted to test students' performance in communication, teamwork, problem-solving and leadership skills. In each skill, students were given some sub-skills that they were asked to tick their level of performance in each skill. The choices ranged from hardly ever to always. The choices were rated as follow: hardly ever=1, rarely=2, sometimes=3, often=4, and always=5. Then, the scores of the four skills were gathered and analyzed so as to determine the extent to which high school students' performance in soft skills is developed.

3.4 Procedures for data collection

Five teachers of English from different schools in addition to the researcher participated in the data collection process. The questionnaires were handed in to the teachers so as to distribute copies to 2nd year baccalaureate students either online or as hard copies, explaining the questions, definition of soft skills and the rubrics of the questionnaires to the respondents. After the administration of the instrument, the researcher respectively collected the instruments for data collation to be analyzed.

4. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

There were many external factors that might influence the results of this study. To begin with, some students weren't able to understand the soft skills elements mentioned in the questionnaire. To solve this issue, students' teachers offered explanation and sometimes translation into Arabic. In order to increase the validity of the findings, the students were chosen from schools in rural and urban areas in the region of Marrakesh-Safi so as to have general view of how high school students perceive the importance of soft skills and to what extent they do have the basic skills like communication, teamwork, problem-solving and leadership. Additionally, there was the case where students took evening classes and how this might affect students' level of soft skills. According to their teachers, only few students had the chance to have extra-hours. Moreover, these classes were mainly for revision. Generally, these factors were far away from influencing the performance of high school students' soft skills.

Another issue that faced the conduction of this study is how to code data from a questionnaire. To solve this problem, deductive coding using pre-existing frame was employed. Basically, the participants were tested at four major skills of soft skills: communication, teamwork, problem solving and leadership. Each skills had five sub-skills that students were asked to rate their performance in it. The choices ranged from hardly ever (1 point), rarely (2 points), sometimes (3 points), often (4 points) to always (5 points). Then, these scores were gathered and calculated in order to get the mean value of students in each skill (using SPSS Statistics. 26).

The instrument's reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha measurement to demonstrate internal consistency. According to the test result, the value is positive. The alpha coefficient for the 20 items in the questionnaire is .837, which suggests that items have pretty high internal consistency. See the table below:

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.837	20

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main results of this study are introduced and discussed in the sections below according to their order of appearance in the questionnaire.

5.1 Description of the participants

High School Students' Perception and Development of Soft skills

In the first section of the questionnaire, the questions given to the participants were basically to collect some general background information. The first information collected is related to the participants' gender. In this study, 53% of the participants were males while 47% were females. They belonged to five different public high schools in the region of Marrakech-Safi. The students' level of education was 2nd year baccalaureate. They were both science and literature streams (see table 1 below).

Table 1: *The participants' gender*

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	53	53.0	53.0	53.0
	Female	47	47.0	47.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Concerning the second question related to whether the participants took evening classes or not. The majority of students said that they didn't take evening classes (extra hours). About 22% took evening classes, while 78% said that they didn't take these classes. The students who took these classes said that it was merely for revision of the textbook lessons and for the preparation of the national exam. This isn't going to have any significant effect on their level of soft skills (see table 2 below).

Table 2: *The students who took the English evening classes*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	yes	22	22.0	22.0	22.0
	No	78	78.0	78.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

As for the third question in this section of the questionnaire, 87% said that they hadn't enrolled any private school before. About 13 % said that they enrolled a private school during their primary or middle school levels (see table 3 below).

Table 3: *The students who enrolled private schools*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Public school	87	87.0	87.0	87.0
	Private school	13	13.0	13.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

5.2 Students' perception on the importance of soft skills

In the second section of the questionnaire, the first question given to the student was basically to find out about their knowledge of soft skills. The students were asked if they had known or heard before about terms like soft skills, life skills, employability skills and 21st century skills. On the basis of the students' answers, it appeared that the majority of students didn't know or heard about soft skills. Out of 100 of second year baccalaureate students, 63% of the participants claimed that they hadn't heard about soft skills or other similar terms. On the contrary, only 37% said that they knew about soft skills and probably had the chance to

develop some skills during their primary or middle schools (see table 4 below). It looks like schools focused more on equipping students with the technical skills and less importance was given to the development of soft skills. This goes hand in hand with what researchers have found about the lack of soft skills among graduates students. This also explains the reasons behind the recent ministerial circular launched by the Ministry of Education (2022-2023) which demands from teachers to start teaching soft skills to students in different extra-curricular activities like clubs (Ministerial Circular, 21/084, 2022). There might be some reasons behind this lack of knowledge of soft skills. According to the teachers of English of the participants, soft skills were taught as integrated skills into the lessons and not in separate ones. They teach skills like working in groups, problem solving, leadership and critical thinking without any reference to the term soft skills. Moreover, students might not be introduced to these skills in other school subjects.

Table 4: *Students' understanding of soft skills*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	37	37.0	37.0	37.0
	No	63	63.0	63.0	100.0
Total		100	100.0	100.0	

As for the 2nd question in this section, the participants were asked about their perception or awareness about the importance of soft skills. The respondents were asked to state “Yes” or “No” to the statement provided in the questionnaire. About (60%) claimed that they were not aware about the importance of soft skills for their personal and professional development. Only 40% of the respondents confirmed that they were conscious about the importance of soft skills and they agreed that soft skills can enhance their chances to get a job in the future (see table 5 below). This finding needs to be taken into consideration by the education policy makers and teachers. This might be due to different reasons because the focus in the Moroccan secondary education is basically on providing students with hard skills more than soft skills. Teachers are shackled by the long curriculum that must be finished on time so as to prepare students for the baccalaureate national exam. Besides, there were no clear guidelines or specific school subjects devoted to the development of soft skills in high schools. However, the teachers of English of the participating classes said that they teach soft skills like communication, teamwork, critical thinking, problem solving as integrated skills in the lessons but without referring the umbrella term ‘soft skills’. Henceforth, effort should be geared toward raising the students’ awareness of the development of soft skills because these skills become more important for students and graduates when applying for a job. Moreover, more emphasis was put on these skills by companies and employers.

With reference to the first question of this study which was about 2nd year baccalaureate students’ perception of soft skills, it was confirmed that the majority of high school students were not aware of the importance of the soft skills. This finding should be taken by the education policymakers in order to help high school students see the urgent need of developing these skills.

Table 5: *Students' perception on the importance of soft skills*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	40	40.0	40.0	40.0

High School Students' Perception and Development of Soft skills

No	60	60.0	60.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	100.0	

Within this second question of this section, the participants were given some soft skills to order according to their significance and importance for them as students and as future employees. On the basis of the literature review, a list of 8 skills was developed. The top four soft skills, as identified by the participants, were communication, teamwork, analytical, and ICT skills (communication skills 27%, teamwork 19%, ICT skills 16%, and analytical skills 14%). On the contrary, leadership, time management, stress resistance, conflict resolution skills were classified of lowest importance (time management 9%, stress resistance 7%, leadership 5%, and conflict resolution 3%) (See table 6 below). In fact, the respondents picked up three of the four major categories of soft skills. This order was highly significant in the sense that students weren't aware of the other skills that are important for employment since they were still in high school. However, time management skills are very essential for students in all education grades and they were not ranked as important. Probably this might be related to the importance of time in their culture.

Table 6: *The soft skills that are important for students (multiple responses)*

Soft skills	Order of importance	Frequency (n=100)
Communication skills	1	27
Teamwork skills	2	19
ICT skills	3	16
Analytical skills	4	14
Time management	5	9
Stress resistance	6	7
Leadership	7	5
Conflict resolution	8	3

In response to question number 3 in this section about what are the best school subjects that can help students improve their soft skills; the students' answers were different and significant. The majority of students chose the language classes as the most suitable environment to develop soft skills. They chose the English school subject as the top preference (39%). About 28% of the students preferred to develop soft skills within the Arabic school subject. The French subject came at the third place (15%). Few students listed the science school subjects as an appropriate environment for the improvement of soft skills (11%). About 7% of high school students said that soft skills can be enhanced in other school subjects (See table 7 below). It is clearly noticed that the language classes are the most suitable environment for the teaching and learning of soft skills. This confirmed what researchers had found about the importance of the English language classes for soft skills development (Ghonsooly and Shoghi 2012). Additionally, the students chose the English subject as the top choice. This choice might be due to their awareness about the importance of the English language in the world. This finding answered the second question of this study which was related to the school subjects preferred by high school students for soft skills development. Hence, language teachers, mainly English teachers, should integrate soft skills activities in their lessons so that students can improve their soft skills. Besides, students should be informed about the importance of other school subjects in which they can enhance their soft skills.

Table 7: Students' preferred school subjects for soft skills development (multiple responses)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	English	39	39.0	39.0	39.0
	Arabic	28	28.0	28.0	67.0
	French	15	15.0	15.0	82.0
	Science	11	11.0	11.0	93.0
	Others	7	7.0	7.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	100.0	

As for the last question in this section of the questionnaire about the implementation of education technology in the development of soft skills, the results of the study showed that the majority of the respondents preferred to develop their soft skills through the use of technology (See table 8 below). The students' choice is highly significant in the sense that teachers should integrate technology in their teaching practices so as to respond to students' needs and to trigger their interest. It is found that education technology has enormous advantages on students' learning. It motivates students and makes them autonomous learners. Besides, students are nowadays more attached to technological devices like smart phones, tablets, and social media. Thus teachers can make use of these devices to enable students develop their soft skills. Thus, as an answer to methods through which students can learn and develop their soft skills, it was confirmed that technology is inevitable in education. In other words, teachers should make use of the new advances in technology and integrate them in their teaching practices so as to meet and respond to their students' needs and interests.

Table 8: Students' responses regarding the use of edtech in soft skills development

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	86	86.0	86.0	86.0
	No	14	14.0	14.0	100.0
Total		100	100.0	100.0	

5.3 Students' level of soft skills

Regarding the last section of the questionnaire which is about testing the development of students' soft skills, it can be noticed that the performance of the 2nd year baccalaureate students' soft skills is below average in all the four skills. The respondents were given a psychology test consisted of 20 statements of the four major categories of soft skills (communication, teamwork, problem solving and leadership skills). The students were asked to indicate their level of performance in each skill. The grading rated from hardly ever=1, rarely=2, sometimes=3, often=4, always=5. Basically, the test evaluates the students' performances in the four major soft skills which are going to be discussed below.

High School Students' Perception and Development of Soft skills

To begin with, the students got 11.8/25 in the communication skills. It can be observed that about few of the tested students have some basic skills of effective communication like active listening, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, verbal communication and non-verbal communication. The participants indicated that they made sure that their messages were understood and clear when communicating with others. They also said that they were confident and able to communicate their needs and concerns effectively in school and outside school. However, the majority of students confirmed that they weren't able to deal with conflicts and disagreements that might appear during conversations. They were also unable to plan their thoughts and ideas carefully before uttering them. Generally, all the participants need to work more in order to develop their communication skills. Moreover, their teachers can make use of this finding and try to help them improve their basic communication skills so as to be effective communicators (see the statements 1,2,3,4,5 in section 3 of the questionnaire).

The second category of soft skills that high school students were tested at was teamwork skills. In this skill, the participants got the average score which is about 13, 7/25. It can be clearly noticed that students' teamwork skills are better than their communication skills. They were aware somehow of the importance of teamwork skills and they grasped them to a good extent. They had the necessary teamwork skills like the ability to work with others to achieve a shared goal, to handle themselves well in all types of school/life situations, to encourage their team members' with a positive attitude, and to minimize disagreements between others. However, few students lack these skills and need to do an effort so as to develop them (see the statements 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 in section 3 of the questionnaire).

As for the analytical skills mainly problem solving ones, the students participating in this study scored below the average. They got 8.2/25. It appears that they still need to develop the basic skills of problem solving like creativity, innovation, application and analyses. The majority of students said that they didn't use plans or systematic order of events in order to find a solution to a problem. Besides, they rarely tried hard to see problems from different perspectives and angles so as to come up with varied solutions. Additionally, they sometimes evaluated potential solutions carefully against a predefined standard. They also confirmed that after finding a solution, they didn't try different ways to enhance it so as to avoid future problems. Few students were aware of the different stages of problem solving. So their teachers need to help them develop these skills through practice of real life problem-solving situations (see the statements 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 in section 3 of the questionnaire).

The last soft skill that high school students were tested at was leadership skill. In this part of the test, the participants scored less than average 9.2/25. They seemed to lack the leadership skills like delegating. Most of the students reported that when they assumed the role of a leader in a classroom project, they didn't assign tasks by considering their classmates skills and interests. They assigned tasks randomly or through lottery. They were also not aware of the characteristics of a good leader like working with others, listening actively and showing empathy by caring about their feelings and concerns and helping them to overcome hard times. Besides, they lack one of the basic skills of leadership which is planning and strategizing. In this regard, the majority of students said that they didn't enjoy planning for long terms. They also lacked the conflict resolution skill in the sense that they rarely solved problems peacefully without procrastinating (see the statements 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 in section 3 of the questionnaire).

To sum up, it can be said that the 2nd year baccalaureate students' performance in soft skills is below average (42.9/100). It looks that few students own some basic communication and teamwork skills. However, they need to improve some other skills because soft skills' development is a lifelong learning journey. On the other hand, these students don't have or possess the basic skills of problem solving and leadership skills. Schools and mainly teachers should make great effort so as to help these students improve their soft skills. This result is probably due to the fact that the focus in the Moroccan schools is mainly on equipping students with hard skills and less attention and practice are given to soft skills' development.

Table 9: *Students' level of soft skills*

<i>Soft skills</i>	<i>Score</i>
<i>Communication skills</i>	<i>11.8/25</i>
<i>Teamwork skills</i>	<i>13.7/25</i>
<i>Problem solving skills</i>	<i>8.2/25</i>
<i>Leadership skills</i>	<i>9.2/25</i>
<i>Total score of the students' soft skills</i>	<i>42.9/100</i>

6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The current study was subjected to certain ethical issues. The students participating in this study were asked in advance if they were willing to take part in this study or not. Besides, the teachers of the students were asked not force any student to complete the questionnaire. This was noticed in the number of students who filled in the questionnaires in the participating schools. The questionnaires were handed in papers and not online because we didn't have access to all the phone numbers and emails of all students. Besides, one acceptance document was designed for teachers and schools' directors. The aim of these procedures was to reassure participants that their participation in this study was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from it at any point and for any reason. They were also promised that their names and their schools' names are not going to be mentioned for ethical reasons and also to keep their privacy safe.

7. CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The main objective of the present study was to investigate the perceptions of students concerning the importance of acquiring and developing soft skills, as well as to determine the extent to which their development of soft skills is achieved. Precisely, this study focused on 2nd year baccalaureate students in five Moroccan high schools. In this study, the goal was to assess students' performance in communication, teamwork, problem-solving and leadership skills. Besides, the participants were asked to express their opinions concerning the use of edtech in soft skills development and to identify their preferred school subjects in which soft skills can be developed. The literature review has found that students need to be equipped with soft skills besides technical ones. This study has confirmed that high school students are not highly aware of the importance of soft skills on their personal and later on professional life. Students need to add these skills to their technical ones so as to increase their chances of finding

High School Students' Perception and Development of Soft skills

and guaranteeing a job in the future. The respondents said that they learn skills like communication, teamwork and problem solving without being aware of their importance. Normally, high school students are usually asked by their teachers to try their best to communicate well their needs and concerns, to work collaboratively in classrooms and to think creatively and critically when dealing with a problem. However, their teachers probably didn't refer to the terms soft skills, employability skills or life skills and their significant importance for students. Recently, there is a strong emphasis on the acquisition and development of soft skills in all grades of school in Morocco. This may lead to a strong awareness among high school students on the importance of soft skills.

Another significant finding that emerges from this study is that the majority of students preferred to develop their soft skills in the language school subjects. They chose the English subject as a top preference followed by Arabic and French. This finding confirms what research had confirmed that the language classes are the most suitable environment for the improvement of soft skills. Moreover, bilingual students found to develop soft skills more than monolingual students. The scientific school subjects came at the fourth place. Additionally, the majority of students said that they prefer their teachers to implement educational technology in the development of soft skills. According to the literature review, edtech has tremendous benefits on the teaching and learning of English and this may develop students' soft skills as well.

The third important finding of this study is that high school students' soft skills are not developed. The students' performance differs from one skill to another. In the teamwork skills, students got the average score. However, they got below the average score in the communication, problem-solving and leadership skills. This result confirms what the respondents said about their understanding and perception of soft skills. In other words, it looks like both teachers and students focus more on finishing the school curriculum on time in order to get prepared for the national exams. They rarely think about developing soft skills in parallel with the technical ones. Thus, clear guidelines and instructions should be provided from the Ministry of Education in order to encourage the acquisition and improvement of students' soft skills so as to prepare them for future challenges and job requirements.

To conclude, it can be noticed that there are necessary actions and changes that need to be taken into consideration by the Ministry of Education and other education stakeholders. Teachers, inspectors, and directors of school need to work together not only to raise students' awareness of the importance of soft skills but also to help them develop their soft skills so as to meet the needs of the labor market.

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