Soft Skills in Language Education: From Perception to Frequency of Instruction

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Abstract

In today's interconnected world, the teaching and learning of soft skills or as other researchers call them the 21st skills has become very important for Moroccan students to develop. The integration of these skills into the curriculum has become an urgent need that should be met immediately. In other words, teachers in general and English language teachers in particular are in the most appropriate position to help their students improve these skills. Unfortunately, research shows that the focus is still on teaching students technical skills more than soft ones. In this regard, this study aims to explore the extent to which EFL teachers are aware of the importance of soft skills education and to identify the frequency of teaching soft skills in the EFL classroom. This study used a quantitative method to collect numerical data to answer the main research questions. It implemented a questionnaire as the main tool for data collection. The participants were teachers of English from different public and private schools in Morocco. Research findings show that though teachers are aware of the importance of soft skills education and can teach them, they rarely help their students develop these skills for many reasons. The findings also reveal that English language teachers still need training in soft skills teaching and assessment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The discussion on improving students' soft skills is taking great consideration in almost all educational systems in the world and Morocco as well. Education policymakers are striving to equip students in primary and secondary schools with the necessary soft skills that are crucial for the 21st-century job market. In addition, there has never been a more pressing need to learn and master soft skills in our increasingly varied and interconnected society. Although the adoption of soft skills education in the classroom has encountered some obstacles that have hindered learning, schools can still play a significant role in this area. Soft-skill embedding is one way to solve this problem. Although there is a need to incorporate soft skills instruction in classrooms (Touloumakos, 2020; Schulz, 2008; Heckman & Kautz, 2012), little research has been conducted on how to teach and assess soft skills in the classroom (Rogers, 2020).

For secondary education institutions, enhancing soft skills in Morocco is of great importance in the school curriculum because of the necessity of these skills, which many

employers are seeking today. Foreign language teachers can play a vital role in making soft skills development clear to students. They can simplify the way skills are taught and evaluated in English. It is important to use appropriate teaching strategies so that students can take an active role in the process and effectively improve their abilities. Students should get a lot of practice in foreign language lessons to help them succeed and grow in their personal and professional lives. They will need to use their technical and soft skills to face daily life challenges and meet the increasing requirements of the job market.

Developing competency in a language fosters students' language and soft skills. Thus, foreign language teachers should design lessons that allow students to refine their abilities in these areas. To track students' progress, the building of reflective and evaluative skills can be part of the first step in learning skill development. Foreign language teachers can assist by giving their students self-feedback so that they can assess their performance. They can provide students with useful tips that assist them in organizing and carrying out small projects because they are required as part of their homework duties. They first go over how to locate credible scholarly sources of information. Then, they assist students in selecting pertinent facts and data and finally offer writing advice (Paes, & Eberhart, 2019). These steps will enable students to foster and improve their teamwork, time management, autonomy, and analytical and organizational skills.

In terms of English language lessons, teachers may assist their students in developing their critical thinking abilities by giving them reading assignments that require them to identify important ideas in texts, evaluate opposing viewpoints, recognize weak arguments, choose strong arguments, and justify their justification. In doing so, teachers provide reading assignments from a new perspective and inspire students to critically consider how they finish reading assignments. Teachers instruct students on how to comprehend subjects, key concepts, and illustrative details, skim and scan, deduce word meanings, and use dictionaries (Paes, & Eberhart, 2019). English language teachers should teach their students how to distinguish between facts and opinions. Besides, students should be able to locate more data to support or refute theories and opinions, provide information in planning, answer inquiries, and create abstracts. These are all very useful skills for a wide range of jobs.

The performance of high school students in Morocco was not satisfactory. They lack basic soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, organization, time management, and analytical skills (Ellah, & Azmi, 2023). This lack is due to many problems and obstacles teachers face when integrating soft skills into the EFL classroom. Nevertheless, being aware of the significance of soft skills and involving students in relevant tasks and practices will unquestionably contribute to students' development of these skills. Hence, the main purpose of this study is to determine how acquainted teachers are with the importance of soft skills education and to explore the extent to which English language teachers in Morocco help their students develop their soft skills.

2. LITERATURE BACKGROUND

Teaching and assessing soft skills are not as simple as they appear. Teachers must be imaginative and inventive as well as willing to attempt new methods and approaches. However, while teaching and measuring students' soft skills performance might be difficult, teachers must make a concerted effort to arrange their course activities and assignments. To teach soft skills, teachers must have sufficient knowledge of the subject as well as the capacity to integrate it into any other field they are teaching. One of the elements influencing the teaching and learning of soft skills among students is teachers' lack of appropriate information (Esa et al. 2015). According to Cinque (2014), there are two main approaches to soft skills education. Firstly, many educational institutions and universities design courses and activities just for soft skills development. Secondly, some other educational establishments integrate soft skills within their

regular curriculum. The choice of which approach to choose for soft skills education is determined by the theoretical framework, the lesson's goal, the student's needs and the activities to be implemented.

In this regard, many schools and colleges opted for the option of integrating soft skills education within the English language course. In the context of formal education, Yorke and Knight (2006) examined two primary methods (parallel and embedded) for promoting the development of soft skills in educational institutions. As an adjunct to the program curriculum, the parallel approach offers students activities that concentrate on the development of particular soft skills (workshops, seminars, research, laboratory activities, group work, project work, etc.). On the other hand, the embedded approach is predicated on the idea that teaching disciplinary material and soft skills is identical. This approach's fundamental premise is that disciplinary competencies or other knowledge-acquisition processes cannot be detached from the development of soft skills. These approaches can differ about the balance between students' autonomy and teachers' support. They include approaches that entail tackling open-ended problems as well as structured tactics, such as debate and cooperative learning. They also include individual coaching and tutoring as well as group assistance like discussion and team-based learning. Soft skills can be taught using a variety of techniques, and they can also be assessed using a variety of approaches, which are discussed next along with assessment problems (Cinque, & Kippels, 2023).

2.1. Soft skills teaching

For many researchers (Azmi, 2018; Varava et al., 2021; Tikhonova et al., 2018), one of the best methods to improve soft skills and personal qualities is to learn English, as this can have a direct impact on a graduate's employability in a highly competitive global labour market. Research has indicated a strong association between an individual's proficiency in English and their soft skills and personal characteristics. Kong's (2018) study proposed "training in communicative English" as a potential job strategy. Specifically, he contended that by allowing students to practice speaking English in the classroom, oral expression skills might be enhanced in addition to English language proficiency. Therefore, after graduating, they were able to swiftly adjust to new situations, particularly those that called for long-term communication skills (Kong, 2018).

Similarly, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Singapore promoted the inclusion of English courses in the curricula of educational institutions, particularly in higher education (HE), after discovering the value of English. The reasoning behind this was the conviction that studying English could provide a solid basis for the development of graduates' soft skills/attributes, which fall into three categories: civic literacy, global awareness, and cross-cultural skills in the first group; critical and creative thinking in the second; and communication, collaboration, and information skills in the third (Hanington & Renandya, 2017).

According to Siyang (2018), project-based learning enables students to interact with one another in English and engage in autonomous, creative, and active participation in their assignments in a workplace that they have imagined. Consequently, it would probably make it easier for students to later interact with the actual workplace (Siyang, 2018). Similarly, Aclan et al. (2016) found that three-stage debates (pre-debate, actual debate, and post-debate) greatly increased the variety of soft skills EFL/ESL students possessed. The phases placed a strong emphasis on the development of a variety of soft skills and qualities, such as information literacy, global citizenship, critical and creative thinking abilities, and intra- and intrapersonal skills (Aclan et al., 2016).

These studies have demonstrated that the primary areas of attention for developing students' soft skills and traits in ELT environments are communication skills, collaborative ability, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and information literacy. This could be explained by the fact that graduates are expected to effectively search for accurate information from various sources, communicate, collaborate, and provide suitable solutions to challenges to successfully secure and retain a job in a labor market that is more competitive than ever.

2.2. Soft skills assessment

It is challenging to evaluate soft skills in the educational setting because of inconsistent definitions and inadequate metrics. However, formative assessments of soft skills are most effective when tracking development and outcomes (Bennett, 2011; Binetti & Cinque, 2015; Scaratti et al., 2015; Kyllonen, 2016). The procedure used in formative evaluations of soft skills is crucial. By contrast, summative evaluations such as exams or tests are often completed after a predetermined amount of time. Several instruments are available to evaluate the growth and acquisition of soft skills, which are sometimes referred to as "observable behaviors" as opposed to "quantifiable knowledge." Numerous academic fields, including developmental psychology, social psychology, sociology, organizational behaviour studies, and experimental pedagogy, have conducted assessment studies. Various techniques can include performance evaluation, peer evaluation, teacher assessment, and self-evaluation.

Assessment is crucial for evaluating soft skills. However, among test developers, soft skills are usually relatively loosely defined, thus extrapolating beyond a particular construct becomes problematic. Rating scales are commonly employed in non-cognitive examinations. Still, there are other extensively used techniques, such as situational assessment tests, anchor vignettes, forced-choice (ranking and preference) approaches, and performance measures, for moderating responses to rating scales (Cinque, & Kippels, 2023). A taxonomy of constructs by methodology was developed by Kyllonen (2016) to show which specific techniques have been applied to the assessment of soft skills. He considered the following five types of methods: performance measures, interviews, situational judgment tests, self-ratings, and other people's ratings. For every technique, variations were observed. Additionally, Cinque, and Kippels, (2023) stated that the creation of alternatives to rating systems for assessing soft skills is likely to be one of the most inventive and significant developments in the coming years. While letters of reference are an option, they frequently serve to support evidence rather than to "measure" soft skills. For some soft skills (like problem-solving, critical thinking, information technology, science, and communication skills), tests (or performance measures) are used; however, early research programs are developing tests in many other areas (like teamwork, cultural skills, creativity, and self-regulation skills)

3. METHODOLOGY
3.1. Research design

To achieve the study's aims, a quantitative method was used to investigate the English language teachers' perceptions and frequency of teaching and evaluating soft skills in the EFL classroom. Bryman (2017) defined quantitative research as the application of numerical and statistical analysis of acquired data. Furthermore, quantitative research converts numerical data into statistics that address the major concerns of the study. It is employed to quantify behaviours, experiences, views, and other variables. According to Bryman (2017), quantitative research generalizes the results of a sample population to develop facts and uncover trends in the study. The aim was to gather information about teachers' perceptions and frequency of soft skills in EFL classrooms. The data gathered from the questionnaires was classified and counted by using the IBM SPSS Statistics 26. Besides, all aspects of the study were carefully designed before data was collected. The ethical side was also given attention in this research by giving teachers the chance to quit at any time. The participants were guaranteed that their personal

information was kept confidential. So, quantitative data is more efficient because it enables to answer the main questions of this study which are:

1- To what extent do English language teachers perceive the importance of soft skills education in the EFL classroom?
2- How often do they teach and evaluate students' soft skills?
3- Do they receive any training as part of their professional development on how to teach and assess soft skills?

3.2. Participants

Around 85 teachers of English from the public and private schools were used as samples and participated in this study. Teachers were randomly selected. The questionnaire was shared with many English language teachers via social media platforms. They were mixed gender of both male and female teachers. They belong to both state-owned and private schools. Thus, the population of this study included teachers from middle and secondary schools in Morocco. The purpose of this study is to explore the teachers' perception of soft skills education and whether they incorporate skills such as innovation, critical thinking, collaboration, communication and problem-solving into their teaching. Participants were requested to take part in this study by completing an online questionnaire. No identification or school name was necessary. The questionnaire was posted online. Hence, participants' personal and professional information was not mentioned in the analysis of data.

3.3. Instrument

Concerning instruments, an online questionnaire was used as the main tool in this study. The questionnaire determines whether English language teachers in Morocco are aware of the importance of soft skills education and how often they expose their students to activities and tasks that foster and develop skills like communication, creativity, critical thinking, teamwork, and ICT skills. The questionnaire consists of four main sections. The first section is for gathering some general information about the participants, such as gender, age, years of experience, and type of school. The second section is dedicated to exploring the extent to which English teachers are aware of the importance of soft skills education. The third section explored the frequency of teaching soft skills. The fourth section investigated how teachers measure soft skills. The last section determined whether English language teachers receive enough training on how to develop students' soft skills.

3.4. Data analysis procedure

According to Patton (2015), the goal of analyzing data is to understand and visually represent the data gathered and analyze and communicate the findings observed. The gathered data was represented through statistical tables using the IBM SPSS Statistics 26. The teachers' answers were summarized to identify patterns and themes via the implementation of descriptive statistics. The data is presented by making use of inferential and descriptive statistics including mean, median, mode, percentage, frequency, minimum, maximum and standard deviation. The data was analyzed by frequency counts. The English language teachers' choices for each skill were counted to find which option occurred the most. These answers or choices for each skill were statistically coded and then presented in charts and percentage forms. The coding for the teachers' practices for developing students' skills is as follows: almost never (1 point) sometimes (2 points), often (3 points), usually (4 points), and always (5 points).

For the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was verified following a pilot study that involved 10 teachers and an inspector of English to get constructive feedback concerning the items included in the questionnaire regarding suitability and clarity. Accordingly, modifications were made to adjust the tool and make any necessary changes.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Demographics

About 85 English language teachers from different regions of Morocco participated in this study. The table below summarizes the attributes that describe the 85 respondents who took part in this study. Table 1 below introduces the demographic variables:

Demographics	Category	Number	Percentage
Gender composition	Male	56	65%
	Female	29	35%
	Total	**85**	100%
Age group	Under 30 years	57	67.05%
	Above 30 years	28	32.94%
	Total	**85**	100%
	BA (License)	64	75.29%
Academic qualifications	Master	14	16.46%
	PhD	7	8.23%
	Total	**85**	100%
	Less than 15 years	67	78.82%
Years of experience	More than 15 years	18	21.17%
	Total	**85**	100%
	Public	51	60%
Type of school	Private	34	40%
	Total	**85**	100%

Based on the demographic findings in Table 1 above, it can be observed that the majority of the participants are male teachers 65%, and only 35% are female teachers. As for the age of the participants, about 67.05% are less than 30 years old and about 32.94% are above 30 years old. Concerning their level of academic achievement, about 75.29% have a BA degree, around 16.46% have a master's degree and only 8.23% have a PhD degree. As for the teaching experience, about 78.82% have a teaching experience of less than 15 years and about 21.17% have been teaching English for more than 30 years. Finally, about 60% of the respondents belonged to the public sector of education while about 40% worked in private schools.

4.2. Emerging themes

The respondents' answers to the questions are going to be described in the section below according to their appearance in the questionnaire. The previous section described in detail the demographic variables. This section is going to present and discuss the main themes of the questionnaire regarding how teachers perceive the importance of soft skills education. It also illustrates the frequency of teaching and assessing soft skills by EFL teachers and their readiness to teach them. Besides, it investigates if teachers are well trained on how to incorporate soft skills in their lessons.

4.2.1. Teachers' perception of soft skills teaching

Regarding English language teachers' perception of soft skills education, the results show that about 37% of the respondents have developed and learned their soft skills during their continuous professional development. In other words, they have received in-service training about soft skills teaching and learning. However, it seems that the majority of English language teachers 63% haven't received enough training on soft skills teaching and assessment in EFL classrooms. Besides, around 73% of the respondents stated that they were highly aware of the importance of soft skills education. They also added that they often sensitized their students about the necessity of enhancing their soft skills.

4.2.2. Soft skills teaching

Concerning the frequency of teaching soft skills, the majority of the English teachers stated that they rarely teach soft skills. However, they were aware of their importance and they tried to teach them from time to time integrated within the English course. As it was found in the literature review of this study, the English classroom is the most suitable environment for soft skills development. Besides, English language teachers can do a better job in incorporating soft skills development like communication, collaboration, creativity, problem-solving, and others in their lessons. Moreover, language classes pave the way for a better development of communication skills. The second question in this section is going to investigate the extent to which the English language teachers help their students develop their basic soft skills and it is going to identify which skills these teachers develop more than the others.

a) Communication skills

The first skills that are going to be presented in this section are communication skills. So, through this questionnaire, the English language teachers were asked to state how often they help their students develop communication skills. Table 2 below is going to present the findings concerning the teaching of communication skills in the EFL classroom.

Table 2: *teachers' support to improve students' communication skills*

Communication Skills	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
	valid	Missing				
Speak effectively and pay attention to non-verbal language like facial expressions	85	0	3.91	.78999	1	5
Don't interrupt your classmates and respect their cultural differences and emotions	85	0	4.17	.69310	1	5
Listen actively and respond by using strong and structured ideas	85	0	3.40	.91548	1	5
Convey their ideas using media other than a written paper (e.g., posters, video, etc.)	85	0	3.32	1.08439	1	5
Raise and answer questions in front of your classmates.	85	0	3.36	1.19370	1	5

On the basis of the findings in Table 2 above, it can be noticed that the majority of English language teachers do help their students develop their communication skills. The most frequent skill that teachers help their students to develop regarding communication skills (Mean= 4.17, Standard deviation= .69310) is not interrupting their classmates and to respect their cultural differences and emotions while the least frequent skill that the English language teachers encourage their students to foster is to convey their ideas using media other than a written paper (e.g., posters, video, etc.) (Mean 3.32, Standard deviation= 1.08439).

b) Teamwork skills

The teachers' responses are analyzed and counted statistically through the IBM SPPSS Statistics 26. The findings of the t-tests are illustrated in the table number 3 below:

Table 3: *teachers' support to improve students' teamwork skills*

Teamwork Skills	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
	valid	missing				
Work in small groups to complete a task together.	85	0	3.76	.89505	1	5
Work with other students to set goals and create a plan for their team.	85	0	3.62	.95090	1	5
Give feedback to peers or assess other students' work.	85	0	3.63	.94927	1	5

Solve problems or disagreements that may happen in your group.	85	0	3.72	.79265	1	5
Present their group work to the class, teacher, or others.	85	0	3.73	.89990	1	5

It can be remarked from table 3 above that the majority of English teachers do help their students develop their teamwork skills. The most frequent skill that teachers help their students to develop regarding teamwork skills (Mean=3.76, Standard deviation=.89505) is to work in small groups to complete a task together, while the least frequent skill that they encourage their students to foster is to work with other students to set goals and to create a plan for their team (Mean 3.62, Standard deviation=.95090).

c) Creativity skills

Table 4 below presents the findings concerning teachers' efforts to assist students enhance their creativity skills:

Table 4: *teachers' support to improve students' creativity skills*

Creativity Skills	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
	valid	missing				
-Use idea-creation techniques such as brainstorming or concept mapping to generate novel ideas and make connections.	85	0	2.10	.74039	1	5
-Generate their ideas about how to confront a problem or question.	85	0	2.24	.82960	1	5
-Invent a solution to a complex, open-ended question or problem.	85	0	2.07	.72026	1	5
-Create an original product or performance to express their ideas	85	0	2.29	.89740	1	5
-Evaluate different ideas and work to improve them to come up with new things.	85	0	2.64	1.20224	1	5

It is highly noticed from the result of the t-test above that the majority of English language teachers do not frequently teach their students to enhance their creativity skills. The most frequent skill that teachers help their students develop regarding creativity skills (Mean=2.64, Standard deviation 1.20224) is to evaluate different ideas and work to improve them in order to come up with new things, while the least frequent skill that they help frequently their students to foster is to invent a solution to a complex, open-ended question or problem (Mean 2.07, Standard deviation= .72026).

d) Critical thinking skills

The table number 5 below displays teachers' practices concerning critical thinking development.

Table 5: *teachers' support to develop students' critical skills*

Critical thinking Skills	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
	valid	missing				
-Compare information from different sources before completing a task or assignment.	85	0	2.20	.09730	1	5
-Draw their conclusions based on analysis of numbers, facts, or relevant information.	85	0	2.45	.89709	1	5
-Summarize or create their interpretation of what they have read or been taught.	85	0	2.28	1.05347	1	5
-Develop a persuasive argument based on supporting evidence or reasoning.	85	0	2.28	1.03062	1	5

-Try to solve complex problems or answer questions that have no single correct solution or answer.	85	0	2.25	1.23930	1	5

It can be observed from the findings of the t-test above that the majority of English teachers do not frequently teach their students to improve their critical thinking skills. The most frequent skill that teachers help their students to develop regarding critical thinking skills (Mean=2.45, Standard deviation=.89709) is to draw their conclusions based on the analysis of numbers, facts, or relevant information, while the least frequent skill that they help frequently their students to foster is to compare information from different sources before completing a task or assignment (Mean 2.20, Standard deviation=.09730).

e) ICT skills

Table 6 below displays teachers' practices for developing students ICT skills.

Table 6: *teachers' support to develop students' ICT skills*

ICT Skills	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	Max
	valid	Missing				
-Using their mobile phones in the classroom to do a task of writing.	85	0	2.21	.09730	1	5
-Using social media to share information and make connections with others.	85	0	2.15	.89709	1	5
-Use the video projector to present their projects or assignments.	85	0	2.24	.95347	1	5
-Use technology to keep track of their grades.	85	0	2.26	.93062	1	5
-Use YouTube and other educational websites to prepare in advance for a lesson or an exam.	85	0	2.22	.92330	1	5

On the basis of the findings of the test above, it can be noticed that most English teachers didn't help their students to enhance their ICT skills. The most recurrent skill that they help their students to improve regarding ICT skills (Mean=2.26, Standard deviation=.93062) is to use technology to keep track of their grades, while the least frequent skill that the English language teachers encourage their students to foster is to use social media in order to share information and make connections with others (Mean 2.15, Standard deviation=.89709).

4.2.3. Soft skills assessment

Regarding the frequency of assessing students' soft skills in the EFL classroom, the teachers' answers seemed to go hand in hand with the findings concerning soft skills education. In other words, the majority of teachers (73%) stated that they assess students' communication and teamwork skills frequently. On the other hand, less attention or concern was given to the assessment of creativity, analytical, and ICT skills (27%). They reported that assessing students' development in soft skills isn't as easy as evaluating students' hard skills. They frequently assess students' communication skills through role plays, debates, and public speaking activities. Besides, they evaluate students' teamwork skills through projects and group work activities. Few teachers said that they use portfolios for soft skills development and assessment. Another remarkable finding that was discovered during the data analysis was that the teachers of the private sector seemed to develop their students' soft skills more than the teachers of the public sector.

4.2.4. Teachers' training

According to the findings from the last section of the questionnaire, most teachers stated that they didn't receive any training on how to teach and assess soft skills in the EFL classroom. Around 63% of the respondents said they hadn't received any training and only 37% claimed

that they had been trained on how to incorporate soft skills education in their lessons. The graph below illustrates this result.

Teachers' training on soft skills teaching

■ Yes ■ No

37%

63%
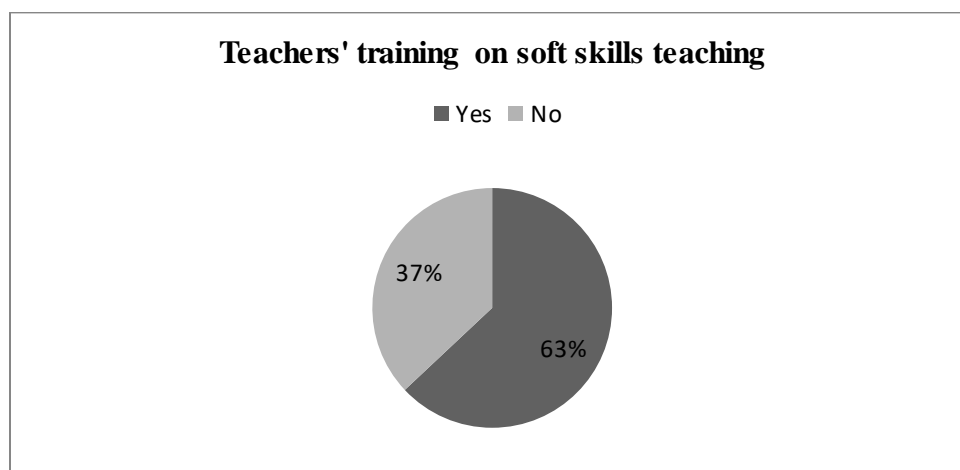
5. DISCUSSION

The study aims to answer three questions related to teachers' perception and soft skills instruction in EFL classrooms. It mainly explores the extent to which English language teachers are aware of the importance of soft skills education in the EFL classroom and how often they integrate and evaluate these skills in their lessons. It also examines whether English language teachers receive the required training on how to integrate soft skills education in their lessons. The main results are discussed below in relation to the research questions and the previous studies.

To begin with, the findings from this study confirm that the majority of English language teachers are aware of the importance of soft skills education in the EFL classroom. They have stated that they do try from time to time to incorporate these skills in their teaching practices. However, these skills are not given much importance and interest like the hard skills due to many reasons. Firstly, the school curriculum doesn't give much importance to the development of soft skills. In other words, the focus in schools is mostly on equipping students with technical skills. Besides, English language teachers seem to teach and evaluate communication and teamwork skills occasionally in speaking or project work. Furthermore, the time allocated for the English course doesn't allow teachers to integrate soft skills development due to the constraint of the long syllabus that needs to be completed on time. Thus, many obstacles face the soft skills development in the EFL classroom. However, some teachers in the private schools said that they do teach soft skills in their lessons and they have these skills integrated in the textbook. They also have weekly English clubs where students can develop their soft skills.

The second main result of this study is related to the frequency of soft skills teaching and assessment in EFL classrooms. In this regard, teachers' answers differ from one skill to another. The majority of teachers said they usually develop their students' communication and teamwork skills to a large extent (see Tables 2 and 3). On the opposite, most teachers reported that they rarely use tasks and activities that improve their students' critical thinking, creativity and ICT skills (see tables 4,5,6) in the EFL classroom. These results are in agreement with the results of a study about students' development of soft skills in the EFL classroom (Ellah, and Azmi, 2023). Thus, efforts should be geared towards encouraging English language teachers to integrate soft skills education in the EFL classroom. Furthermore, teachers should provide students with activities and tasks that enable them to improve their analytical skills (problem-solving and critical thinking). Teachers also stated that they do assess communication and teamwork skills more than they assess critical thinking, creativity and ICT skills. This result reveals that teachers need to receive appropriate training on how to teach and assess these skills.

As it was mentioned earlier in this study, teaching and assessment of soft skills aren't as easy as teaching and evaluating hard skills. In general these results may be due to lack of in-service training.

The last main result of this study is related to teachers' training. The majority of teachers confirmed that they didn't get enough suitable training on how to teach and assess soft skills in EFL classrooms. This result provides an answer to the lack of soft skills education in schools. Therefore, due to the value and importance of these skills in today's labour market, teachers need more training on how to help students enhance these skills in secondary school. In this sense, supervisors can organize some seminars and workshops for teachers how to teach and assess soft skills properly.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study tried to understand teachers' perceptions of soft skills instruction in the EFL classroom. The results of this study reveal a problem that needs to be addressed by teachers, students and education policymakers. Nowadays, researchers insist on the incorporation of soft skills in the school curriculum due to their importance in students' personal and professional lives. Soft skills are highly demanded by companies and employers. English language teachers are in the best position to foster and to instil these skills in their students. Teachers can be inventive and creative in developing their students' communication, teamwork, creativity, ICT, and analytical skills. This study also indicates that though a good percentage of Moroccan English language teachers are aware of the importance of soft skills teaching and assessment, there many others who don't integrate these skills in their lessons. Therefore, schools and education authorities should reconsider and adjust the current curriculum and teaching practices to include and enhance the desired soft skills.

In light of the findings above, the study recommends that teachers and education authorities should make great efforts to ensure that they are equipping their students with the necessary skills. They should provide sufficient training on soft skills teaching and assessment for English language teachers. In this regard, this study raises awareness among students, teachers and supervisors. The education policymakers should select the skills that are pertinent to the Moroccan culture and socioeconomic context. Then, they need to define them and give teachers both theoretical and practical guidance on how to improve students' soft skills in the EFL classroom. Moreover, they must outline and explain practical approaches and strategies for teaching and evaluating soft skills. In other words, they should pave the way for soft skills development at an early age. Furthermore, the curriculum designers should take soft skills development in high schools into consideration so as to equip students with the required soft skills besides the technical ones. This study has some limitations. It didn't include many participants. Further research can target a large population of English language teachers in Morocco. Besides, more soft skills can be included into this study.

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