



Examining Students' and Perceived Teachers' Attitudes towards Soft Skills' Integration in Master's Programs: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract

Moroccan higher education institutions are expected to realign their objectives and implement updated pedagogical practices that promote the inclusion of soft skills. Nevertheless, the actual implementation of these skills continues to face difficulties and sparks considerable debate. This research aims to examine students' and perceived teachers' attitudes towards soft skills' integration within Moroccan master's programs of English department and explores the differences between them. To achieve these objectives, a cross-sectional design was employed; quantitative data was collected from 208 master students through the use of questionnaires. The findings indicate that students hold positive attitudes towards the integration of soft skills, whereas professors are perceived as moderately enthusiastic and constrained by practical course limitations. The results of the paired test illustrate a statistically significant difference between students' and perceived teachers' attitudes, with a p-value less than 0.001. Therefore, the findings of this study would imply a need for a balanced integration of cognitive and social skills, namely the practical engagement of those skills through the use of innovative approaches and methods.

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the rapidly changing world, the mission of higher education has been changed throughout time. Economic, societal, and cultural changes have urged higher education institutions to adopt current approaches and methods in order to meet global standards. In this respect, adopting an approach that encourages soft skills' integration is a serious issue that should be tackled. In fact, soft skills cannot be developed by reading books; yet, there is a need for a collaborative environment (Levasseur, 2013). Therefore, higher education stakeholders, namely professors and administrators, are encouraged to consistently reflect on the objectives of their institutions by providing suitable facilities and modernizing pedagogical practices. This would result in a successful integration of soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, collaboration, leadership, and management. These skills have emerged as critical in the 21st century. In fact, today's job market requires employees who possess technical skills alongside soft skills. Mitchell, Skinner, and White (2010) state that employers prefer employees who can demonstrate various soft skills in their work because discipline-based knowledge is insufficient for career advancement. That is, soft skills facilitate a variety of tasks like conflict resolution, team collaboration, effective communication, time management, and networking, all of which contribute to productivity and innovation. Therefore, the present study bridges the gap

between theory, policy, and practice in the integration of soft skills. Its main objectives are to examine students' and perceived teachers' attitudes towards soft skills integration in higher education and investigate whether a difference exists between them. Based on these objectives, this study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What are students' attitudes towards integrating soft skills in master's programs?
- 2) What are perceived teachers' attitudes towards integrating soft skills in master's programs?
- 3) Is there any significant difference between students' and perceived teachers' attitudes?

Three hypotheses are tested in this study: 1) It is hypothesized that students have positive attitudes towards integrating soft skills in master's programs. 2) It is hypothesized that teachers are perceived to have positive attitudes towards integrating soft skills in master's programs. 3) It is hypothesized that there is a significant difference between students' and perceived teachers' attitudes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Defining Soft Skills

Different definitions are provided to the notion of soft skills. According to Gilman (1989), "skill" is the capacity to employ knowledge in an effective way and to be ready for action or performance. It is an acquired ability to perform something competently. Yet, soft skills are qualities that make it possible for individuals to engage with others successfully (Ritchards & Schmidt, 2013). The provided definitions underline the fundamental nature of soft skills as the capacity to effectively employ knowledge within real-world contexts and interact constructively with others. While Ritchards & Schmidt (2013) underline the effectiveness of soft skills in promoting successful interpersonal engagement, Gilman's perspective emphasizes the practical use of acquired skills. Both definitions stress the value of these competences in both academic and personal contexts; they highlight how they improve interaction, teamwork, and general competence. Another definition was provided by Snell, Siddle, & Whitehouse (2002), they define it as non-technical and non-formal. Rather, they are aptitudes, qualities, and traits that relate to personality, attitudes, and behavior. Snell et al.'s definition considers soft skills as intangible qualities connected to one's personality, attitudes, and behaviors. Beyond technical skills and academic achievement, these qualities are crucial for managing social relationships, communication, teamwork, and adaptation. Additionally, the definition provides a clear understanding about the extent to which soft skills determine a person's overall effectiveness and success in every aspect of life.

2.2. The Importance of Soft Skills in Higher Education

Soft skills are crucial for all graduates to acquire, regardless of their field of study. There is an agreement among professionals that graduate students must be ready to enter the job market. University students ought to be equipped with both hard and soft skills that help them apply their disciplinary knowledge directly in the context of work. Nevertheless, in most studies and reports related to employability, employers make complaints about the newly hired graduates' low level (Ahn, Pearce, Kwon, 2012). Ahn et al., (2012) employed a survey in the

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eastern seaboard region of the United States; it was conducted with recruitment specialists from construction companies. The study focused on identifying the key skills and competencies required for construction graduates from the perspective of the industry. Descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis were used to generate the study's findings from the survey data. Means and standard deviations (SD) are used for each of the essential skills for graduates in the construction industry to measure their importance. The recruiters for construction companies perceive problem-solving skills, interpersonal skills, and ethical issues as effective competencies for construction graduates. This implies that the industry places a high value on soft skills and prefers employees who possess them. However, some soft skills such as, environmental awareness and communication were lacking among the 14 key competencies, indicating that these areas may be improved if individuals are fully aware of their significance. The findings of the above-mentioned study implicate that soft skills should be integrated in higher education. Obviously, lack of soft skills competences among students can negatively affect their professional development. In this respect, John (2009) writes: "today's professionals need to encompass a high soft skills quotient, apart from the domain knowledge in order to succeed in this competitive era" (p. 19).

Soft skills are perceived as equally important as cognitive skills (John, 2009). In fact, cognitive skills shape our knowledge whereas soft skills such as creativity, critical thinking, leadership, and communication are equally vital. They enhance teamwork, drive personal growth, and foster positive relationships. Together, these skills build a well-constructed individual, they are important in achieving success in academic, professional, and personal aspects of life. Therefore, teaching soft skills could make a difference in hiring new graduates for a job in their field (Evenson, 1999). That is, Effective teaching that emphasizes critical thinking alongside interpersonal development empowers students to excel academically and thrive in their future careers. However, the low level of soft skills among university graduates is a serious problem. According to Chamorro-Premuzic et al., (2010), it is of great importance to incorporate a set of non-disciplinary skills, such as communication, cooperation, and problem solving in higher education. They also state that soft skills involve numerous competencies that are rarely assessed explicitly. It is valuable to understand the importance of non-academic skills in higher education. Cooperation, communication, and problem-solving are examples of soft skills that have a direct impact on students' overall development and future success. However, evaluating and assessing them remains difficult and challenging since it necessitates innovative approaches to adequately evaluate and develop these vital skills.

Despite being essential and important, it is noticed that soft skills are somehow marginalized in higher education sphere; they are rarely taught and assessed because they depend on subjective evaluation (Tevdovska, 2015). This subjective nature of soft skills competences makes it challenging for educators and stakeholders to find an international guide that may help them integrate soft skills into higher education course objectives. The new requirements of the job market urge 21st-century learners to be equipped with the needed skills to enter the job market, and for educators to have methods and techniques to teach them. It is stressed that educators should teach their students the spirit of cooperation in the workplace (Evenson, 1999). Educators must adapt their teaching methods and techniques to equip students with the 21st-century skills, ensuring they are job-ready. For instance, involving a spirit of cooperation in the classroom will prepare students for collaborative and successful experiences in the

workplace, aligning their education with real-world needs. The latest studies show that recruitment specialists hire graduates with robust interpersonal skills since they are valuable for any organization to be successful (Glenn, 2008).

2.3. Soft Skills and EFL higher Education in the 21st century

Students are required to possess the ability to demonstrate their knowledge, use information, and convey their thoughts persuasively (Armstrong & Warlick, 2004). This idea carries significant implications in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in higher education. These implications emphasize the necessity of equipping students to successfully communicate and utilize their English knowledge, which has increasingly become important in today's ever-changing society. Higher education should support these goals by preparing them to be globally competent individuals capable of succeeding in an interconnected world. Therefore, Soft Skills' training should be the duty of all stakeholders, including educators. (Dharmarajan, Pachigalla & Lanka 2012). In fact, language teachers need to include in their teaching process interactive methods, approaches, and activities that help students engage in real situations and authentic tasks that require problem-solving skills, all of which assist them to adapt to various contexts. Engaging students can be achieved by conducting project work which involves communication, collaboration, negotiation, and the development of challenging outputs (Warschauer, 2001). In this respect, new approaches to language teaching and learning must be applied so as to prepare EFL learners to navigate diverse linguistic and cultural situations confidently.

2.4. Teaching Soft Skills in EFL Higher Education

The integration of soft skills into the course objectives of undergraduate and postgraduates' students becomes a necessity in today's EFL higher education. According to Schulz (2018), two ways could be employed for enhancing soft skills: self-training or enrolling in formal training. While formal training is found in formal contexts such as institutions and universities, self-training includes a variety of socialization forms with family, friends, colleagues, and other members of society. According to Chondekar (2018), two models can be used to improve students' soft skills within formal trainings: Standalone and embedded. 'Stand-alone subject model' allows students to improve soft skills through courses designed specifically for that purpose (Chondekar, 2018). According to Chadha (2006), stand-alone approach (explicit) means allowing learners to acquire soft skills apart from the main course modules. Chondekar's (2018) concept of a 'stand-alone subject' appears to give a planned and intentional method to developing soft skills among learners. Crespí, López, González, Rodríguez-Barroso, & Virués (2025) conducted research across two universities in Spain and Mexico to evaluate the effectiveness of soft skills curricular subjects designed specifically to develop students' intrapersonal (e.g., self-awareness) and interpersonal competencies. Using a quasi-experimental pre-test & post-test design, the study assessed 1,353 students who participated in courses created to target soft skills development. The results showed that these specially designed subjects significantly impacted students' soft skills, particularly intrapersonal competencies, demonstrating the value of standalone curricular approaches in fostering soft skills when structured intentionally within higher education programs. In fact, this model recognizes the significance of soft skills in personal and professional development by

providing dedicated courses specific for improving them.

The second model is the 'embedded model'. According to Pachauri & Yadav (2013), the embedded model relies on integrating soft skills within the course in teaching and learning activities. Unlike stand-alone subject approach, embedded model is not dependent on taking special and extra courses. Rather, learners are instructed to acquire soft skills through the use of different formal teaching and learning activities that are designed and carried out using particular methodologies and strategies (Pachauri & Yadav, 2013). The embedded model of incorporating soft skills within the curriculum appears to be a pragmatic approach that recognizes the importance of holistic skill development. While integrating soft skills into regular educational methods and activities, students can apply these skills in real-world contexts. This model provides a practical approach to strengthening soft skills. Accordingly, Pritchard (2013) argues that incorporating soft skills into the official program is the most effective technique of teaching soft skills. When some soft skills are integrated into the basic modules, students develop them throughout their program (Shakir, 2009). Integrating soft skills into core modules expands students' learning experiences. This comprehensive strategy promotes the continued development of critical and interpersonal skills throughout the whole academic program. To successfully employ the embedded model, teachers should design and conduct formal teaching and learning activities to help students build soft skills through the use of specific techniques and methods (Aziz & Zaidoune, 2022). In fact, the successful employment of this approach would be determined by the careful design of teaching methods and their alignment with the intended skill objectives.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research approach and design

To reach the objectives of this study, a quantitative approach was employed to investigate perceived teachers' and master students' attitudes towards integrating soft skills in master's programs and the difference between them. Within this approach, a cross-sectional design was employed in order to collect data from different respondents at a single point of time. The main aim was to examine students' and perceived teachers' attitudes and compare these two variables at the same time without tracking changes over time. In fact, in this particular design, "the researcher collects data at only one point in time" (Cresswell, 2005, p. 355).

3.2. Sample population and context

This study was conducted at the national level targeting Moroccan master students who belong to English departments in different Moroccan universities of letters and human sciences including, Moulay Ismail University in Meknes, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University-Dhar El Mahraz- and -Sais- in Fez. The sample population should include people who can help the researcher with their experience and background that would give unbiased results to the topic under study. The researcher distributed 300 questionnaires and received 208.

3.3. Sampling Technique

The suitable type of sampling for the present study was a combination of both stratified sampling and convenience sampling. Stratified technique is classified under probability sampling which sounds as a scientific sampling technique (Dornyei, 2007). It is used when there are subgroups (or strata) of different sizes that the researcher is willing to investigate

(Mertens, 2010). The sample population is usually stratified on the basis of one variable or more. (Dornyei, 2007). Since this research targeted master students from different universities in Morocco, it was necessary to divide the population into distinct subgroups or strata based on the variation across universities. That is, the three Moroccan universities form the strata. This allowed the researcher to ensure representation from each university and account for any variation between master programs. Within each stratum (master programs), the researcher made use of convenience sampling to select participants conveniently available from the English department of each university. After the stratification of the sample population, convenience sampling was used within each stratum. The researcher opted for convenience sampling because it involves a sample population who are available and accessible. The convenience sampling technique was used when “members of the target population are selected for the purpose of the study if they meet certain practical criteria, such as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, easy accessibility, or the willingness to volunteer” (Dornyei, 2007, pp. 98-99).

3.4. Data collection Instruments

The present study employed quantitative approach; it used the questionnaire to collect numerical data. The questionnaire was used to assess perceived teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards integrating soft skills in master classes. The survey was further employed to determine whether a significant difference exists between the attitudes of master students and their perceived attitudes. Questionnaires provided a structured approach for efficiently collecting quantitative data. Dornyei (2007) writes: “the results of a questionnaire survey are typically quantitative” (p. 101). The essence of scientific research is to find answers to questions systematically. In fact, a questionnaire has become one of the most popular research instruments applied in the social sciences (Dornyei, 2003). Questionnaires allow researchers to gather large amounts of data from a significant number of participants, enabling them to generalize findings. In the present study, the questionnaire was used to assess perceived teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards integrating soft skills in master classes and highlights the difference between them.

3.5. Data analysis

Different data analysis techniques were used to reach the objectives of the study. In fact, the questionnaires were used to quantitatively assess attitudes. This means that the findings are generated through the use of SPSS, providing numerical data for all the variables. That is, means and standard deviations were used to assess students’ and perceived teachers’ attitudes. Moreover, paired sample-test was employed to compare the attitudes of students towards integrating soft skills in master classes with their perceptions of teachers' attitudes. Therefore, this study combines between descriptive and inferential statistics.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Students’ Attitudes towards Integrating Soft Skills in their Master's Programs

Table 1. Mean scores of students' attitudes

Descriptive Statistics

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Statements	Mean	Std. Devia tion
1. I feel motivated about integrating soft skills in my master program.	4,27	,771
2. I think that including soft skills in my master program can provide a positive atmosphere.	4,38	,618
3. I am willing to take the challenge of learning soft skills.	4,18	,712
4. I am worried about integrating soft skills because it might confuse my learning process.	2,26	1,060
5. I am ready to make changes in my learning style to enhance my soft skills.	3,74	,864
6. I always try to seek resources and attend professional trainings to improve my soft skills.	3,83	,895
7. I believe that improving my soft skills is important for my future careers.	4,49	,644
8. I have concerns about making a balance between soft skills and academic content.	3,43	1,114
9. I think that soft skills' integration in master programs is efficient for my academic and professional development.	4,24	,892
10. I think that the inclusion of soft skills in Moroccan master programs of English department enhance quality education.	4,33	,673
11. I am certain of the enormous benefits of acquiring soft skills.	4,30	,707
12. I doubt about practical details and mechanisms of integrating soft skills.	3,42	1,047

Table (1) shows a variety of students' attitudes about the integration of soft skills in their master's programs. Students feel motivated about integrating soft skills in their master's programs (Mean = 4.27, SD = 0.771). Also, they believe that soft skills' integration can provide positive classroom atmosphere (Mean = 4.38, SD = 0.618). Moreover, students are willing to take the challenge of learning soft skills (Mean = 4.18, SD = 0.712). As for learning challenges, student express a disagreement on the idea that soft skills might confuse their learning process (Mean = 2.26, SD = 1.060). Moreover, students express their readiness to change their learning habits to enhance their life skills (Mean = 3.74, SD = 0.864). Additionally, a willingness to seek opportunities and attend trainings is well demonstrated (Mean = 3.83, SD = 0.895). The majority of student believe that the mastery of soft skills is essential for future careers (Mean = 4.49, SD = 0.644). However, they express their worries about making a balance between soft skills and other academic course content (Mean = 3.43, SD = 1.114). Students perceive the integration of soft skill as important for their academic and professional success (Mean = 4.24, SD = 0.892), they also believe that the inclusion of soft skills provide integrity and quality (Mean = 4.33, SD = 0.673). Students express a strong positive belief toward soft skills' benefits (Mean = 4.30, SD = 0.707). Nevertheless, they apparently express their doubts about practical details and mechanism of integrating soft skills (Mean = 3.42, SD = 1.047).

4.2. Perceived Teachers' Attitudes towards Integrating Soft Skills in their Master Programs

Table 2. Mean scores of perceived teachers' attitudes

Descriptive Statistics		
Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. I think my professors are motivated about integrating soft skills in their master classes.	3,40	,937
2. I think my professors believe that including soft skills in their classes can provide a positive environment	3,86	,777
3. I think my professors are willing to take the challenge of teaching soft skills	3,37	,943
4. I think my professors worry about including soft skills because it might confuse their teaching process.	2,77	1,022
5. I notice that my professors are ready to make changes in their teaching methods to enhance students' soft skills	3,42	,944
6. I notice that my professors seek opportunities and attend professional trainings to improve their pedagogical practices.	3,22	,906
7. I notice that my professors believe that teaching soft skills is essential for preparing us for our future careers.	3,84	,895
8. I notice that my professors have concerns about making a balance between teaching soft skills and other academic course content.	3,39	,926
9. I think that my professors believe that integrating soft skills in master programs of English department is important for our professional an academic development.	3,79	,853
10. I think that my professors believe that the inclusion of soft skills in Moroccan master programs enhance integrity and quality education	3,87	,809
11. I think my professors are certain of the enormous benefits of teaching soft skills and they are ready to adopt this approach.	3,74	,906
12. I think my professors have doubts about pedagogical practices and mechanisms of integrating soft skills.	3,44	,920

Table (2) shows the findings about perceived professors' attitudes-from master students' perspectives- towards integrating soft skills into their master classes. Students observe that their professors are motivated about soft skills' integration in their master classes (Mean= 3.40, SD= 0.937). Moreover, students see that their professors believe in the positive environment that soft skills' integration can provide (Mean= 3.86 = SD = 0.777). It is noticed that some students observe that their professors are ready and willing to teach soft skills (Mean = 3.37, SD = 0.943). The majority of respondents (Mean = 2.77, SD = 1.022) disagree with the idea that integrating soft skills may confuse their professors' teaching methods. In addition, students notice that their professors are ready to make changes in their teaching practices to enhance students' soft skills (Mean = 3.42, SD = 0.944). The findings show that students do not clearly view that their professors seek opportunities to improve their practices

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(Mean = 3.22, SD = 0.906). There is a strong consensus among students that their professors believe teaching soft skills is essential for future careers (Mean = 3.84, SD = 0.895) and for overall development (Mean = 3.79, SD = 0.853). Students express their professors' concern about balancing the teaching of soft skills with other course content (Mean = 3.39, SD = 926). The perceived teachers' belief that integrating soft skills enhance integrity and quality education (Mean = 3.87, SD = 809). Also, students think that their professors are convinced of the benefits of teaching soft skills and they are ready to adopt the approach (Mean = 3.74, SD = 906). However, concerns about the pedagogical practices and mechanism of integrating soft skills are demonstrated (Mean = 3.44, SD = 0.920).

4.3.The Difference between Students' and Perceived Teachers' Attitudes towards Integrating Soft Skills in their Master Programs

Table 3. Paired sample test of students' and perceived teachers' attitudes

Pair	Students' attitudes – teacher perceived attitudes	Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper			
1		4,7439	6,38164	,44355	3,8694	5,61845	10,695	206	,000

Table (3) shows the obtained results of the paired test which illustrate a significant difference between students' attitudes and perceived teachers' attitudes among master students of English departments. From the above-mentioned table, it is clear that the p-value is less than 0.001 which confirms that the difference is statistically significant.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1.Students' Attitudes towards Integrating Soft Skills in Master's Programs

Research Question 1: What are students' attitudes towards integrating soft skills in master programs?

Research Hypothesis 1: It is hypothesized that students have positive attitudes towards integrating soft skills in master programs

The findings illustrate that students have positive attitudes towards the incorporation of soft skills into their master programs of the department of English. Students show their recognition of these skills' importance for both professional and personal development. From a quantitative perspective, students demonstrate a strong willingness and cognitive consciousness as well as readiness to take action, seek resources, and make changes to boost their soft competences. Nevertheless, there are concerns about balancing soft competences

with traditional academic content. This is because of the lack of a standardized approach and criteria to implementation and assessment that align with the refined objectives.

The findings of the present study align with ElShaabany (2021). She targeted different universities in the Middle East, investigating accounting and finance students' interest in soft skills' acquisition. The study manifested an overemphasis on technical courses, which restrained students' interest in learning soft skills. Further, ElShaabany's study (2021) highlighted the challenges that hinder balancing technical and soft skills' development. In line with the present study, ElShaabany drew attention to the importance of incorporating soft competences into curricula and suggested practical improvement for development to address these obstructions. As a consequence, both studies address the critical need to reform the educational system to allow soft skills' integration with maintaining the academic rigor. Additionally, ElShaabany found that students are ready to take on the challenge of soft skills' acquisition. This echoes the affective, behavioral, and cognitive readiness that are identified in the present study. Thus, students' willingness and awareness to engage with soft skills are key elements for effective incorporation.

5.2. Perceived Teachers' Attitudes towards Integrating Soft Skills in Master's Programs

Research Question 2: What are perceived teachers' attitudes towards integrating soft skills in master programs?

Research Question 3: Is there any significant difference between students' and perceived teachers' attitudes?

Research Hypotheses 2&3: 2) It is hypothesized that teachers are perceived to have positive attitudes towards integrating soft skills in master programs. 3) It is hypothesized that there is a significant difference between students' and perceived teachers' attitudes.

The present study provides insights into perceived professors' attitudes-from students' perspectives- towards soft skills' integration. The findings uncover a significant gap between students' own enthusiasm and the perceived readiness of their professors. Quantitative findings confirm this gap; the paired test shows a highly statistically significant difference ($p < 0.001$) between students' attitudes and their perception of their professors' attitudes. Professors are perceived as having a moderate level of enthusiasm and preparedness because of many contextual factors. That is, students may be more enthusiastic and have higher expectations for soft skills' incorporation whereas professors might prioritize traditional academic content due to master program's course objectives and institutional expectations. Another factor includes the challenges that professors may face like time constraints and lack of resources. Additionally, communication gaps between students and professors can have a great impact on students' perception. In other words, the lack of an effective communication between students and teachers can result in students' misconception. Furthermore, every professor has his unique teaching philosophies, and this variety can have a direct impact on students' perspectives.

Students perceive that there are barriers to soft skills' integration. These key limitations include time constraints, reliance on traditional teaching methods, assessment challenges, and

old course structure, all of which contribute to this disconnect between students' and their perceived professors' attitudes. This indicates that students view the existing course structures as static since they heavily emphasize academic content with limited focus on practical engagement and collaborative works. This gap is consistent with the findings of Nedjah and Hamada (2017) within Algerian universities. They explored teachers' perceptions of creativity as a soft skill in EFL classrooms. Their study found that professors hold positive attitudes of the importance of creativity, but they have an unclear vision and understanding of creative thinking skill, the thing which hinder its incorporation. Accordingly, the results of the present research highlight professors' awareness of the effectiveness of soft competences in both professional and academic success as well as their importance for students' meaningful contributions to global challenges and sustainable development. Yet, various obstacles like lack of practice and lack of interactive teaching strategies can hinder the integration of soft skills.

The hypotheses of the present study are confirmed. That is, the quantitative findings reveal that students hold positive attitudes toward integrating soft skills into their programs. This suggests students' recognition of the value of soft skills such as communication, creativity, and critical thinking. In other words, students are willing to complement their academic knowledge and enhance their transversal competences. The general findings align with global shift in education, where students need practical competences to be ready for the demand of modern job market. Moreover, there is indeed a highly significant difference between students' and perceived professors' attitudes. This brightens a critical perspective of the study. The difference may arise from a variation in priorities. That is, students may favor direct soft skills' applicability so that they can be ready for their future careers. However, professors might place more emphasis on traditional academic objectives and feel restricted by planned factors. For instance, they might be bound by rigid course objectives, institutional standards, time constraints, and many other obstacles. Hence, these triangulated findings highlight the need for strategic adjustments to bridge this gap. Students call for relevant and meaningful course content, interactive learning methods and flexible teaching practices in order to overcome barriers to soft skills' integration.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the integration of soft skills in Moroccan master's programs within the Department of English; It examines both students' and perceived teachers' attitudes. Findings reveal that students hold positive attitudes toward soft skills at the affective, behavioral, and cognitive levels, whereas professors are perceived as moderately enthusiastic and constrained by practical course limitations. The paired-sample test confirmed a significant difference between students' attitudes and their perceptions of professors' attitudes ($p < 0.001$). This implies that students are more enthusiastic while professors prioritize academic content. This study provides new evidence of the perceptual gap between students and professors regarding soft skills' integration. It also highlights the need for targeted pedagogical strategies and institutional support to bridge this gap and enhance the incorporation of soft skills in master's curricula.

5.3. Implications

This study highlights the need for students to take charge of their own learning and actively participate in its process while emphasizing soft skills' development. That is, when students understand the value of both social and cognitive skills for their academic and professional development, they are encouraged to interactively engage with activities that boost their creativity, critical thinking, communication, and problem solving. These skills strengthen students' academic performance and enhance their employability competences. As for professors, the present study necessitates the refinement of professors' pedagogical practices as well to support soft skills' integration. Professors are encouraged to adopt new approaches like problem-based learning, learner centeredness, and performance-based assessment in order to successfully integrate social skills. In fact, the use of various models and skill-based teaching activities such as workshops, seminars, and case studies can significantly provide students with opportunities to display and practice their capabilities in real world and dynamic contexts.

5.4. Limitations

By highlighting the limitations of this study, other researchers can address areas that need further research. Although this study provided valuable insights, there are some limitations that should be identified. One of the main limitations of this study is the issue of representativeness and generalization of findings. That is, this study targeted Moroccan master's programs of the department of English; the data was collected from three universities within the region of Fes-Meknes. No one can deny the fact that the findings of this study provided deep insight into soft skills' integration in Moroccan master's programs. Yet, the representativeness of findings may be limited and may not be generalizable to other Moroccan universities. In other words, not all Moroccan institutions have the same objectives, resources, and policies; therefore, these variations may have an impact on how soft skills are taught and assessed. Additionally, the use of quantitative approach might leave some gaps in understanding students' perspectives and experience; therefore, employing qualitative data can provide context and capture nuanced perspectives through open-ended questions and descriptive information. Despite having these limitations, this study provided insightful findings about the incorporation of soft skills within humanities, specifically in English studies

5.5. Implications for future research

One of the areas that should be targeted in future research is the scope of participants. That is, all higher education members should be included in the study (professors, administrators, stakeholders) in order to offer a general overview on the integration of soft skills from all perspectives. In addition, further or future research could investigate an interesting variable which is master programs' objectives and its impact on shaping the integration of soft skills. Also, analyzing master's programs' objectives can be helpful in identifying areas for improvement and examining the impact of these objectives on teaching and assessments methods. Based on the findings of the present study, future research could explore the impact of interactive teaching models, activities, and assessments methods that are underutilized on

the development of soft skills. This can be done through longitudinal studies that trace students' soft skills' development within their master's programs for a period of time.

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