



European Journal of Educational Research

Volume 11, Issue 4, 2303 - 2313.

ISSN: 2165-8714

<https://www.eu-jer.com/>

Soft Skills Through the Prism of Primary School Teachers

Laila Ouchen * 

Cadi Ayyad University, MOROCCO

Lahcen Tifroute

Cadi Ayyad University, MOROCCO

Khadija El Hariri 

Cadi Ayyad University, MOROCCO

Received: June 9, 2022 • Revised: August 25, 2022 • Accepted: September 17, 2022

Abstract: COVID-19 and the expansion of distance learning pose new challenges to the educational system. Soft skills are imperative in this context, for children's effective and adaptive learning. The following study aims to discover teachers' representations by identifying their common conceptual framework of soft skills in primary school. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers. The teachers' comments helped identify and define a framework of soft skills that would help children learn effectively. The results illustrate that the lack of practice of soft skills activities depends on the teachers' perceptions of the importance of their role in transmitting disciplinary knowledge. The study concluded that the lack of a clear and shared vision of soft skills influences the representations and practice of teachers.

Keywords: *Common referential, primary school, soft skills, teachers, teaching practices.*

To cite this article: Ouchen, L., Tifroute, L., & El Hariri, K. (2022). Soft skills through the prism of primary school teachers. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 11(4), 2303-2313. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.11.4.2303>

Introduction

Psychological suffering, risk behaviors, and violent behaviors among young people are expressions of malaise. These problems have multiple causes and affect specifically vulnerable people. The health reports, underline that the rate of tobacco, alcohol consumption and suicide among young people is on the rise worldwide after the crisis of the COVID-19. To fight against these problems, schools have relied on the concept of soft skills. The interest in soft skills in primary school emerged in the 1990s in order to develop projects aimed at the well-being of children and promoting their health, especially with the evolution of the concept of "health" to a more dynamic and a more positive meaning.

Soft skills are a priority for helping children cope with stress, social pressure, or failure. They represent assets likely to strengthen their psychosocial skills by enabling them to manage their interactions with their environment positively. Recently, researchers agreed on integrating soft skills in educational programs. The interest is to allow learners to acquire effectively these transversal competences. In the same vein, the 21st-century learning report (Battelle for Kids, 2019) claims that learning skills should be implemented in three groupings: critical thinking, technological, emotional, and social. All these skills have to be combined during the teaching process. This view is supported by Denham et al. (2014), who showed that the teaching of soft skills should start early and be developed continually. The main objective is to allow children to learn through soft skills to use their scientific, procedural, and, above all, human knowledge to improve their ability to adapt to the mutations of the 21st century.

Buchanan et al. (2020) add that these skills make it possible to improve the quality of learning and contribute to coherent educational and employment progress. They also allow learners to acquire the necessary know-how for the world of work. Indeed, based on the evidence from job postings, soft skills are more frequently found as a job requirement for applications (Lyu & Liu, 2021).

Although, the quality of teaching is a crucial factor in promoting effective learning of soft skills in schools. Teachers must understand how to teach a specific content to their learners (Ngang et al., 2015). Recalling this effect that soft skills have been used in reaction to traditional practices based on directive learning. Furthermore, the interest in soft skills is a recognition of the significant role of education because teaching is no longer limited to preparing children for school but to giving them the tools for academic and social success.

Tican and Deniz (2019) investigated Teachers Opinions concerning using 21st Century Learner and 21st Century Teacher Skills. They analyzed the data from 391 students from an education faculty and concluded that a positive, medium and

* **Corresponding author:**

Laila Ouchen, Cadi Ayyad University, Morocco. ✉ laila.ouchen@ced.uca.ma

significant correlation was found between soft skills learners and soft skills teachers. This element illustrates the importance of developing a pedagogical relationship between the child and his teacher, in other words, an original relationship that makes the educational act more alive. However, the lack of institutionalization of these skills into daily classroom practices is one of the reasons that can lead to the low acquisition of these skills.

That negatively affects the child's development and slows down the acquisition of a value system which could helping him/her become the citizen of tomorrow. Teachers play a vital role in this process. There is evidence to indicate that practical soft skills depend, among other factors, on teachers' reflections of how they construct and incorporate soft skills in their daily practices (Sa et al., 2021).

Additionally, it was revealed by various studies that teachers had problems implementing an educational program appropriate for that purpose. They regard the limit of their pedagogic actions intended to help children. Although teachers are behind soft skills programs and practices in the classroom, little attention has been paid to analyzing their perceptions. Little is known about teachers' knowledge of soft skills. In this study, we aim to help fill this gap by seeking to understand the soft skills representations of elementary school teachers in Morocco.

Nevertheless, no research in literature focused on the teachers' experiences in this domain, especially on their perception of the soft skills or the activities they use to help children develop soft skills. Therefore, this study aims to reveal the opinions of primary teachers on soft skills and the supportive exercises they use in the classroom through the qualitative research method. The interest is to understand the perception of the importance of these soft skills by teachers and to answer the following question: What soft skills will children need?

Literature Review

Child development depends on a supportive environment of high quality that helps them acquire skills that improve their physical, mental, moral, spiritual, social, and emotional development. The preamble to World Health Organization (WHO) Constitution of 1948 defines *health* as "full physical, mental and social development, not limited to the absence of disease or disability". In line with this, at the Ottawa Conference in 1986 it was noticed that this policy should be strengthened by accentuating the individual abilities, especially "skills to control his health" (Wilkinson et al., 2004).

This original text makes possible to locate soft skills at the heart of public health. At the international level, therefore, there has been a desire to ensure that children are in good mental health at all ages. Learning to "live together" and "live with oneself" is central to brain development, as it helps a child develop the mind and the body to enhance his linguistic, motor, and cognitive development. However, the Moroccan public school is going through a "learning crisis" (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2022).

For this reason, soft skills have become a necessity for children to learn well. The analytical reading of the concept of soft skills shows that it still raises several questions regarding its definition, origin, and classification. That explains the different disciplines used to determine the translation of soft skills. Researchers have no agreement on using a specific term for these skills. We can find soft skills, interpersonal skills, life skills, socio-emotional skills, basic skills, or 21st-century skills. The term is also associated with some synonyms, such as general and fundamental skills. That is especially evident as soft skills originate from approaches open to different sciences and examined by researchers from different backgrounds and disciplines. Despite this diversity, definitions generally agree that these skills make effective and harmonious interaction with others and oneself.

In contrast to competencies, how skills need to be honed to succeed in work or learning are primarily related to behaviors of a social nature, such as critical thinking (Ramdani et al., 2022), emotional intelligence and living together (Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Schulz, 2008). In the educational field, soft skills are defined as a set of personal competencies related to the environment in which a child lives. They are interactively linked to the knowledge and values acquired through activities and practical applications (Alzahrani et al., 2019). In general, soft skills can be qualified as opposed to academic skills (Gilyazova et al., 2021). The main objective of this learning process is to enable the child to adapt constructively and flexibly to his or her environment and to promote his or her education systematically and practically (Schulz, 2008; Trigueros et al., 2020).

In other words, soft skills represent everything a child does daily (Eid, 2020), which requires mastering basic skills during practical life learning in different environments (Arslan et al., 2021; Bouffard & Vezeau, 2010). That explains why it is so difficult to precisely determine soft skills (because they vary according to an individual's needs and demands in the face of environmental problems and attitudes). Teaching soft skills is one of the most effective solutions for this objective. Some examples of personal competencies can be found in the table below. The emphasis on Soft Skills develops learning these skills helps children flexibly organize their perceptual abilities and engage in social behaviors that enhance their emotional and transactional intelligence (Algan et al., 2018; Shankland & Rosset, 2017).

In addition to learning how to integrate thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to achieve a goal, it involves defining the expected learning tasks in a specific social and cultural context. That includes promoting certain interactional skills, such as the ability to belong to a group, empathy, collaboration, and the ability to listen effectively. The importance of this education in educational reform is evident, as it is the foundation from which any reform must be launched.

Indeed, it allows children to develop psychological, and cognitive skills that enable them to obtain flexible learning and succeed in their school careers, by reducing school dropouts and their harmful consequences. Studies show that a child's brain in childhood is immature, and this feature will extend into adolescence and not end until the onset of maturity. As a result, his brain cannot think and act like an adult. Concepts of time, conservation, emotional and social intelligence may differ (Artino & Jones, 2012). The soft skills approach at this stage provides valuable tools to manage the child's behavior in the classroom and adapt to the demands of his age (Trouchaud, 2016).

She reports that aggressive behaviors are widespread in childhood, and she explains how the child uses these behaviors to get something or to express himself. Using soft skills is an excellent way to help him foster social interaction with his peers, according to a study by (Cosso et al., 2022). Several analysis have shown that aggressive behavior in early childhood is the best predictor of adolescent delinquency (Carpentier & Desbiens, 2021).

Webster-Stratton (2005) showed that 10-25% of children suffer from health problems related to aggressive behavior. On the other hand, children who learn the rules of social interaction have a better chance of being successful in life. Vienne (2008) confirms that adopting aggressive behavior results from a lack of social skills. Indeed, the researchers analyzed the results of children who received soft skills education and confirmed a positive relationship favoring the creativity (Saygi et al., 2022) and the development of emotional skills in the long term (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). There is also a relationship between soft skills and communicating the needs respectfully of children (Artino & Jones, 2012).

Table 1. Examples of Soft Skills Important to Children's Education

Cooperation and teamwork	Autonomy	Empathy	Emotional intelligence
Ethical behavior	Persuasion	Leadership	Communicating with others
Critical thinking	Problem-solving	Flexibility	Collaborating with others
Responsibility	Willingness to learn	Citizenship	Emotional intelligence
Learning to learn	Time management	Independence	Self-esteem
Lifelong learning	Critical thinking	Negotiating	Problem-solving
Active listening	Working in a group	Creativity	Adaptability

This study aims to reveal the opinions of primary school teachers on soft skills concepts and the practice teaching they use in the classroom. To achieve this aim, answers to the following questions are sought:

1. What do teachers think about the soft skills concept?
2. What are teachers' opinions about using programs for soft skills within the classroom?
3. What are the personal observations and experiences of the teachers relating to teaching soft skills?
4. What are the essential soft skills that can develop classroom learning in primary school?
5. What are the difficulties teachers encounter while developing children's soft skills, and what solutions they propose for these difficulties?
6. What are teachers' suggestions for developing the soft skills of children?

Methodology

Research Design

The topic of this study is teachers' perceptions of the soft skills needed by children. The exploratory and descriptive method was chosen to understand the phenomenon in question in-depth. So, this study was based on the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) developed by Smith and Shinebourne (2012). This method aims to understand the individual experience and the interpretation made by the individual who lives the phenomenon in the study. It is about exploring similarities and differences in the experiences of people experiencing a similar phenomenon "to understand how particular people in a given context understand a particular phenomenon". The aim is to understand the specific experience of the respondents in its natural context and to obtain detailed information about the conceptual approaches regarding soft skills in primary education.

Sample and Data Collection

The study was applied in the city of Marrakesh in the first term of the 2021-2022 academic year. The sixteen selected participants teach in ten different rural and urban schools. To achieve the objectives, Semi-structured interviews were relied upon. Before the interview form was created, literature on soft skills for children in primary school was reviewed. In order to increase internal validity, international and national studies were screened, and the articles that may be included in the interview protocol were selected. After that, interview questions were prepared according to the study's aims. Developed according to a guide consisting of instructional questions that frame the interview. These questions were presented to five experts with a Ph.D. in education and familiarized with the primary school context. The opinions

of the experts were examined, and necessary corrections were made. In the pilot study, a teacher not part of the sample was interviewed with the corrected final questions. In line with the teacher's feedback, the sense in one sentence is clarified, and an additional question is added. For this purpose, general information was first obtained on the frameworks involved in the interview, and questions were raised regarding: (a) age, (b) educational level, and (c) professional experience.

As knowledge acquired using the qualitative curriculum is built in a non-selective manner focused on moving from part to whole, questions on soft skills were asked in two phases. Initially, data were collected regarding (a) the working definition of soft skills, (b) the inclusion of soft skills in the classroom, and (c) personal observations and experience. During phase two, a list of updated soft skills for the study was shared with the respondents. The latter provides a comprehensive list of the skills most widely cited in the educational field, with thirty soft skills included in the list. This exercise aims to provide a standard and tool to assist interviewees in (a) identifying the most essential soft skills that can support classroom learning and (b) identifying the most motivating skills for learning.

Purposive sampling was conducted to compose a sample characteristic identified as relevant to our study. In this respect, teachers were selected according to their age group, work experiences, educational background, and institution type where they work. It should be noted that the qualitative nature of the variables is associated with educational frameworks. The sample of participants was gradually formed as individual interviews progressed until data saturation was obtained.

Before the interview, all teachers received an interview guide containing the questions. It was confirmed to the participants that all the data collected would be entirely confidential and would be used only for scientific research. It was also specified to them that they could choose the time and the place of the interviews according to their availability and, of course, withdraw from the interview whenever they wished.

The recording was also canceled, respecting the request of some participants. In the interview questions, biased, confirmative, or refuting expressions were avoided, and care was taken not to show mimics and significative gestures. After the interview, the member check application was made by reading a note to the participants. The participants were asked whether there were expressions that they did not approve and that they wanted to be taken out.

Participant-specific codes were also used to keep the interview's information confidential and private. The sample includes ten female teachers (E1, E2, E3, E4, E11, E12, E13, E14, E15, E16) and six male teachers (E5, E6, E7, E8, E9, E10).

Personal Characteristics of Teachers:

Table 2. The Personal Characteristics of Teachers

Code	Institution type	Area	Level education	Experience	Age groups
E1	Public school	Rural area	Master's degree	12 years	6-7 years
E2	Private school	Urban area	Licence's degree	03 years	8-9 years
E3	Private school	Urban area	Licence's degree	02 years	6-7 years
E4	Private school	Rural area	Licence's degree	7 years	10-11 years
E5	Public school	Urban area	Licence's degree	15 years	11-12 years
E6	Private school	Urban area	Master's degree	04 years	7-8 years
E7	Private school	Rural area	Licence's degree	05 years	8-9 years
E8	Public school	Urban area	Licence's degree	17 years	10-11 years
E9	Public school	Urban area	Master's degree	15 years	11-12 years
E10	Public school	Rural area	Licence's degree	06 years	7-8 years
E11	Public school	Urban area	Licence's degree	02 years	6-7 years
E12	Public school	Urban area	Licence's degree	10 years	10-11 years
E13	Private school	Rural area	Licence's degree	06 years	6-7 years
E14	Public school	Urban area	Licence's degree	18 years	9-10 years
E15	Public school	Rural area	Licence's degree	19 years	9-10 years
E16	Private school	Urban area	Licence's degree	01 years	7-8 years

Analyzing of Data

The API method proposed by Smith and Shinebourne (2012) guided the entire data analysis process. Content analysis is based on the transcripts of the interviews, following the steps of a floating reading, thematic analysis, and, finally, coding the data. Thus, each interview was analyzed individually.

Data were written without interpretation to increase internal reliability. The verbatim was annotated in the first step, and these notes allowed the identification of themes and sub-themes. This operation of thematization was based on the labeling method proposed by Lejeune (2019). The content of the interviews was compiled, organized, and read more

than once to better understand the comments of the participants in the study. At the end of the process, all of the elements identified were brought together around a single theme.

This labeling work remained faithfully to the discourses using the participants' own words and a simple vocabulary without introducing terms with theoretical connotations. It also included observations on non-verbal communication to provide a comprehensive dimension to the descriptive analysis of the interview passages. The data were then categorized and organized.

After repeated reading and annotation of the interviews and through an iterative process between data and thematization, each interview was cut into coded extracts. In order to increase the reliability and credibility of the study, the transcripts of 4 participants, i.e., 25% of the total number of participants, were presented to an expert for review. The inter-coder reliability was calculated with the formula proposed by Miles et al. (2014): Agreement/ (Agreement + Disagreement) x100. According to the formula, an agreement of 80% is established. The same authors explain that 70% or more reliability means that the coding is reliable.

For the research question " What are the essential soft skills that can develop classroom learning in primary school? data were obtained from teachers' comments regarding their opinion of soft skills using a list of skills developed for the study. Each teacher first selected the skills they felt were most important for children's learning and then ranked them according to the motivation for teaching them to children. The data were analyzed descriptively to rank the skills in order of importance. The statements of the participants that could be used as direct quotations were determined, and frequency tables were elaborate for the soft skills frequently repeated.

Results

Data analysis of the study was done considering the stages of data coding, finding themes, organizing codes and themes, and finally defining and interpreting the findings. The data were separated into meaningful sections based on the research aims. As a result of these classifications, themes were formed. Themes and sub-themes obtained from teachers' opinions are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes	Sub themes
Objective and the definition of soft skills in primary school	Teachers' opinions about soft skills Development of children's soft skills in primary school Exercises teachers use to support soft skills children
The most important soft skills for learning children	Opinion of the teachers about soft skills The soft skills important for children Teachers' suggestions to develop children's soft skills

Objective and Definition of Soft Skills in Primary School

According to the analysis, there is considerable convergence between the responses of the preschool and the primary school teachers. The pedagogical actors give a large definition of soft skills, and there is no standard or specific understanding of this term. Some consider soft skills as "skills of interest to a child's life" (Participants E2, E5, E13).

Others assimilate them to the "study skills" (Participants E1, E3, E8, E12) and "everything that can help a child to grow" (Participants E9, E6); while others respond that they are a "new concept" (Participants E1, E4, E10, E12). On the whole, the proposed responses revolve around various skills that are not necessarily soft skills, like "curiosity" (Participant E11) and "reading" (Participant E7), other interviewees connect them to school themes such as "the rapidity of memorization" (Participants E14, E16) and "the promptness of mental calculation." (Participants E6, E8, E9)

Five teachers also said these skills are more suitable "in Europe than in Morocco." (Participants E1, E5, E8, E13, E15) Two teachers announce that "instructional resources are not available" (Participants E9, E15) and that "we must have the basic materials in the classroom first." (Participants E15). Two other teachers say, "I can't develop the soft skills of the children in my class, I have 40 students" (Participants E8, E12). Another participant says "maybe if I had a group of 10 or 15 children" (Participant E13). In general, the interviews point to a lack of personal initiative in teaching soft skills. Only five teachers affirm that they encourage students to work in groups and outside the school.

Two teachers state that they give them responsibility in class and propose activities in this sense. Fourteen teachers state that they do not use soft skills activities because of the lack of resources in the classroom. Moreover, they do not use them because of the difficulty of teaching and evaluating them in children. Oppositely, four teachers used drama activities, conversations, questions, and answers to help children understand and realize their soft skills.

The reasons for this attitude vary from one teacher to another. One interviewee attributed the reason to "lack of time" (Participant E4), and another teacher spoke of "the need to meet the exam schedule" (Participant E16). Five respondents spoke more about the demands of parents who want more disciplinary content for their children. It was evident from the

answers obtained the desire of the educational frameworks to engage in pedagogical projects that would develop children's skills and improve their learning conditions. The objective according to the interviewees is to transcend some daily problems within the classroom as the "low concentration of children" (Participants E9, E14, 15), "children's conflict" (Participants E2, E3, E11), and "irritation" (Participant E6, E5).

The Most Important Soft Skills for Learning Children

The updated soft skills list served as a tool to clarify the concept and help the participants work to identify the most important skills children need in their studies. There was a common accord between educators on the importance and necessity of the proposed skills for a child's success in his personal and school life. It is also clear that acquiring these skills is among the teachers' priorities. Although they could not give clear examples at first, some of them said, "This is what we try to teach the children without prior knowledge of appellations" (Participant E15). The connection was also made to the goals of the educational programs.

One teacher explained, "Some of these goals are required as outcomes in the educational program." (Participant E13). That clearly shows the importance to design a straightforward conceptual framework for soft skills and the elaboration of a unified and common language for use by teachers. To identify the essential soft skills for children, only those skills mentioned by the majority of participants were considered. Nearly 40 proposals were collected. These terms were coded and grouped, and ten principal skills emerged. The following figure illustrates the skills identified by the teachers for the primary levels.

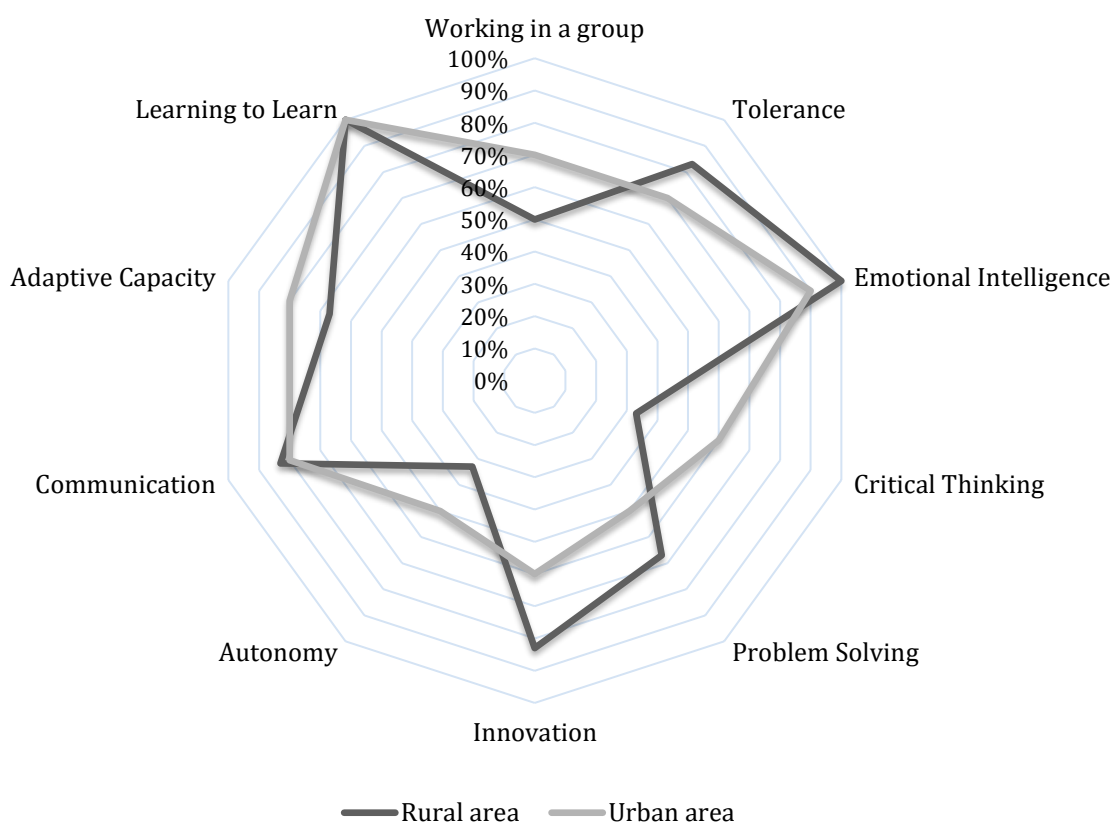


Figure 1. The Most Important Soft Skills for Learning Children

This list is a helpful reflection of the soft skills teachers consider essential for today's children. The data show that some soft skills are more important than others from teachers' perspectives. They include intrapersonal skills, i.e., like critical thinking, interpersonal skills related to social life, like coexistence, tolerance, problem-solving, and learning to learn. This last skill, learning to learn, is the most important for all participants. An interviewed teacher said about this point "You can't talk about teaching the other skills until this skill is learned first" (Participant E15) and "Learning to learn is an essential skill; it is the goal of all the skills" (Participant E14).

Another group of teachers linked this skill to success and professional duties. They confirmed, that "if a child learns these skills, he will have very satisfactory results" (Participant E5, E7, E10). Another teacher said, "allowing the child to acquire his skills is a professional duty, it is essential" (Participant E1) and if he knows how to learn, he will succeed in his life. "Other skills can come with this skill" (Participant E4, E9, E13, E16).

It should be noted that most interviewees were enthusiastic about integrating soft skill activities into daily classroom practices. The following figure shows the order of the skills that the teachers want to learn to integrate into their didactic activities.

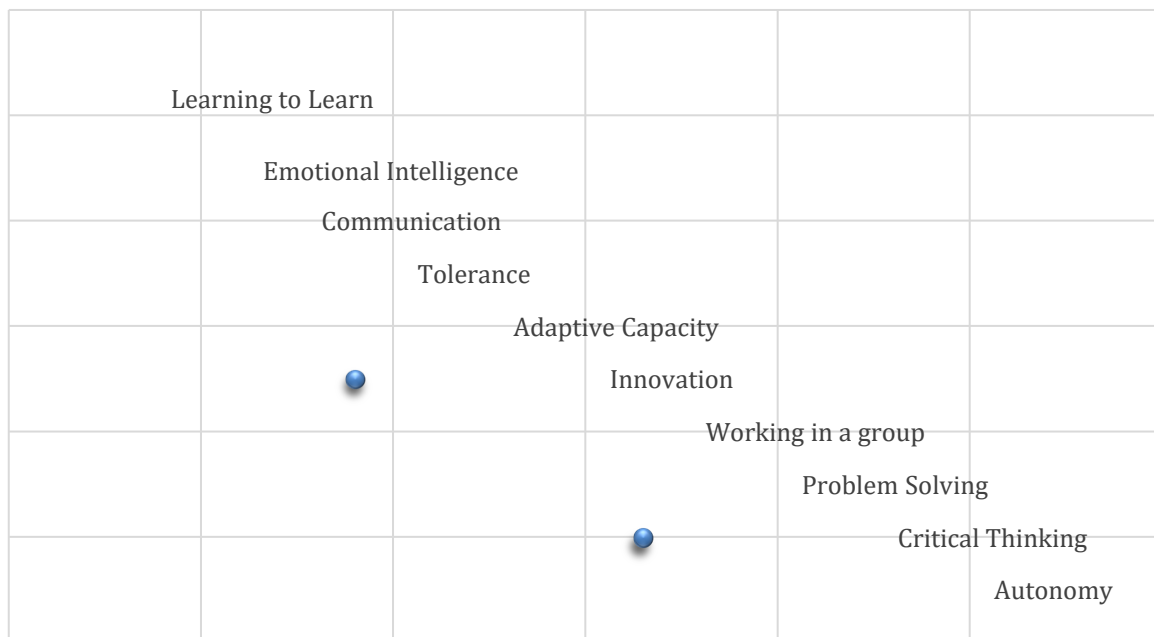


Figure 2. Ranking Soft Skills by Motivating Participants to Teach Them

We were interested in what the teachers wanted to transmit and develop in children and with which pedagogical approach. Two teachers explain that the content of the disciplinary subjects is amply sufficient. Three teachers state that they do not have clear ideas for activities to be used. Finally, the teachers provided several suggestions. Fourteen teachers suggested that teachers should share their knowledge and experience. Four teachers emphasized the importance of being flexible and using appropriate approaches to make children feel comfortable.

Twelve teachers advised their colleagues to take soft skills courses; five teachers affirm the need for more pedagogical materials and to reduce classroom populations. Furthermore, ten teachers suggested that the program's soft skills should be better introduced to teachers. Fourteen teachers said that parents should collaborate with them to reinforce the learning of soft skills.

Discussion

Data analysis was based on data triangulation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Triangulation involved comparing this study's findings with those of previous research studies. The findings indicated many similarities while providing more clarity in particular areas. Our findings indicate that participants shared a positive view and an awareness of the importance of soft skills for children. However, in practice, they revealed that they use a limited repertoire of the teacher's narratives. Consequently, no references were motioned concerning the adopting strategies with the potential to enhance the process of children's development of soft skills. Furthermore, no mention was made of the development of the teachers' soft skills as a supporting strategy for the children's soft skills.

These results match those observed in earlier studies. Esen-Aygun and Sahin-Taskin (2017) revealed that most teachers have never heard of the concept of social-emotional learning. Al-Wattary (2021) found that most teachers' knowledge of soft skills programs was limited and that they were unaware of initiatives implemented in their schools. The study by Herawati et al. (2022) explains that instructional leadership significantly influences teachers' willingness to change. Also, the capacity to create a clear and measurable vision, mission, and corporate goals is a sign of visionary leadership (Muhimmah et al., 2022).

It should be noted that through these interviews, a clear educational consensus was observed for a greater understanding of these skills and how they are taught: the importance of building positive relationships between children and adults. These findings further support the idea of Balagova and Halakova (2019). For them, building a teacher-student relationship is essential for creating trust, respect, and mutual understanding. Also, support from parents has a good and significant impact on children's competencies (Bazán-Ramírez et al., 2021).

Studies have shown that teaching soft skills must be done in a participatory approach involving the different educational actors in the child's environment, namely the school and the family (Algan et al., 2018). However, it was noticeable that

none of the teachers made explicit reference to strategy associated with the involvement of the families as a complement to their classroom work. It was evident that the implementation of soft skills has mainly depended upon teachers' interests in awareness of soft skills. In this respect, the UNICEF (2017) report shows that Morocco does not have a definition of soft skills education as clear as most African countries. Accordingly, teachers do not have a common conceptual framework to identify and define these competencies in a specific and straightforward way.

That can be explained by the fact that most of the definitions adopted for these skills are from international sources which makes them extraneous concepts in the perceptions of teachers. So, for the interviewed teachers, they can only teach soft skills daily in some geographical regions and only to children with a specific social class. This perception is the opposite of the soft skills philosophy that focuses mainly on achieving social justice and equal opportunities. Many of interviewees claimed also that the soft skills development must be assured in small groups.

Nevertheless, in Morocco, the evolution of the number of students has been steadily increasing. As a result, the ratio of students to teachers has dropped to 27.9 in 2017-18 from 25.5 in 2009-2010 (Superior Council of Education, Training and Scientific Research [SCETSR], 2021). Ferreira et al. (2021) refer to the many simple activities teachers can use in the classroom with large groups. These planned activities aim to provide children with opportunities to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships and behave according to the social norm (Ainley & Carstens, 2018). That is in line with the findings of researchers who consider that the cause of behavioral problems in children is the lack of some social soft skills.

The data show that for most teachers, the focus is on knowledge acquisition, for example, by providing several pieces of information or definitions related to soft skills. However, they rarely present teaching methods and facilitation techniques to develop these skills. This finding is similar to the survey (SCETSR, 2021), which found that teachers have difficulties to discuss their teaching practices and methods. Similarly, it was identified that teachers use few activities for soft skills analysis, synthesis, and evaluation activities. That is confirmed by the results of Moroccan students having low success in international exams such as PISA and TIMSS.

Almost all of our participants mentioned the teacher's importance in children's soft skills development. However, they also lacked conceptual information and activities concerning Soft Skills. They state that they need ongoing training to help them better implement soft skills activities in the classroom. According to Abdul-Raof and Musta'amal (2022), training geared at improving teachers' knowledge and skills positively impacted their behavior, helping them to be more successful teachers.

The results of the 2018 Talis survey showed similarly that more than 80% of teachers report that in-service training positively impacted their teaching practices (Ainley & Carstens, 2018). However, the latest report on the teaching profession in Morocco clearly shows a deficit in in-service training. The majority of the teachers surveyed assert that they rarely benefit from continuous training. Some indicate the last one was more than 15 years ago (SCETSR, 2021). Our findings point to the need for integrating a soft skills component in primary teacher initial training programs. Such a training component should aim at equipping the teachers with a diversified repertoire of strategies easy to use in class.

Conclusion

Quality education is considered a child's right and an obligation of the country by the requirements of the Constitution. The established national pillars aim at forming an honest and tolerant Moroccan citizen, passionate about the search for knowledge and learning, aware, creative, and willing to participate in public affairs. There is no doubt that the achievement of these objectives depends on a dynamic education system that is open to its environment. These goals require a greater focus on soft skills. The objective is to give the teacher multiple tools to teach soft skills appropriately.

The study showed that this depends on the teachers' knowledge, training, and motivation. Indeed, the combination of these three foundations helps to frame and guide the teaching of soft skills in the classroom. The goal is to provide a strategic learning context that matches the objectives and opportunities available in the classroom. Indeed, the analysis of the responses obtained and the analysis of the teachers' non-verbal communication clearly show their openness and their desire for an educational approach for soft skills

The analysis of this data also allows us to explain some of the obstacles associated with using soft skills activities. However, the main objective of most of the participants remains the education and cognitive development of children. That explains why academic activities are particularly mentioned. For the majority of teachers, the professional duty is to help their learners achieve satisfactory academic results. The personal development of the teachers interviewed is linked mainly to the grades obtained by the child, especially since, for most teachers, the development of other aspects of the child's personality is the family's responsibility.

All these elements highlight that to integrate soft skills activities in the classroom successfully, the teacher must be motivated and better supported. Indeed, the teacher of the twenty-first millennium must have the necessary skills to define the teaching methods and stimulate the learner's curiosity with outstanding excellence, creativity, and innovation. In other words, a teacher who has soft skills and believes in their importance follows the evolution of education and he is ready to learn throughout his life.

Recommendations

The study's findings revealed some pedagogical implications for implementing soft skills effectively at the school level. Several teachers mentioned soft skills as being useful in the classroom. They claimed, however, that they had never perfected any of these abilities. In this perspective, continuous training is essential to implement soft skills activities effectively in the classroom. Furthermore, implementing soft skills as a school-wide development opportunity would allow many studies to improve the benefit of the program soft skills. Thus, the results of the study indicate the need for further research into the concept of soft skills in education. Field research would be of particular importance for indicating the key needs of teachers, the specificity of their terrain, and anticipated difficulties. Also, it is necessary to initiate action research on the training teachers' objectives, which should be conducted to ensure that teachers develop better soft skills competencies. More research on implementing the soft skills program in class may be conducted in the future. Researchers will be able to design practical pedagogical tools to accompany teachers in implementing these programs in a class.

Limitations

The following are some of the research's limitations. To begin with, the number of people who took part in this study was small. Second, the results are subjective and mainly apply at the local level. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be comprehended in a general way as the qualitative-phenomenological research concept also have a local dimension.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Ouchen: Conceptualization, design, data acquisition, data analysis, writing. Tifroute: Conceptualization, supervision, reviewing, final approval. El Hariri: Conceptualization, design, supervision, reviewing, final approval.

References

- Abdul-Raof, S., & Musta'amal, A. H. (2022). Competency framework of agriculture educators vocational college: Measurement model using partial least square-structural equation modeling. *European Journal of Educational Research, 11*(3), 1523-1534. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.11.3.1523>
- Ainley, J., & Carstens, R. (2018). *Teaching and learning international survey (TALIS) 2018 conceptual framework* (OECD Education Working Papers). OECD iLibrary. <https://bit.ly/3q2F8KO>
- Algan, Y., Huillery, É., & Prost, C. (2018). Confiance, coopération et autonomie: Pour une école du xxie siècle [Trust, cooperation and autonomy: For a 21st century school]. *Notes du Conseil d'Analyse Economique, 48*(3), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.3917/ncae.048.0001>
- Al-Wattary, N. (2021). Teachers' perspectives and experiences of social emotional learning in a secondary school in Qatar. *Journal of Education and Practice, 12*(36), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.7176/jep/12-36-01>
- Alzahrani, M., Alharbi, M., & Alodwani, A. (2019). The effect of social-emotional competence on children academic achievement and behavioral development. *International Education Studies, 12*(12), 141-149. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v12n12p141>
- Arslan, A., Haapanen, L., & Tarba, S. (2021). Prosocial skills development in children and social value creation during COVID-19. *Strategic Change, 30*(2), 109-115. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jsc.2394>
- Artino, A. R., & Jones, K. D. (2012). Exploring the complex relations between achievement emotions and self-regulated learning behaviors in online learning. *The Internet and Higher Education, 15*(3), 170-175. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2012.01.006>
- Balagova, L., & Halakova, Z. (2019). Teacher-students' interaction in comparison of teacher's self-perception and students' point of view. *European Journal of Educational Research, 7*(3), 465-472. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.7.3.465>
- Battelle for Kids. (2019). *Framework for 21st century learning*. <https://bit.ly/2HgDq4q>
- Bazán-Ramírez, A., Montes-Iturrizaga, I., & Castro-Paniagua, W. (2021). Household possessions and parental support in Mexican students with high scientific competencies in PISA 2015. *European Journal of Educational Research, 11*(1), 259-366. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.11.1.259>
- Bouffard, T., & Vezeau, C. (2010). Intention d'apprendre, motivation et apprentissage autorégulé: Le rôle de la perception de compétence et des émotions [Learning intention, motivation and self-regulated learning: The role of perceived competence and emotions]. In M. Crahay & M. Dutrevis (Eds.), *Psychologie des apprentissages scolaires* [Psychology of school learning] (pp. 66-84). De Boeck
- Buchanan, J., Allais, S., Anderson, M., Calvo, R. A., Peter, S., & Pietsch, T. (2020). *The futures of work: What education can and can't do*. Futures of Education UNESCO. <https://bit.ly/3OeSpds>

- Carpentier, T., & Desbiens, N. (2021). La communication sociale chez les enfants présentant un trouble du comportement: Une avenue vers des interventions prometteuses [Social communication in children with behavioral disorders: An avenue to promising interventions]. *Enfance en Difficulté*, 8, 47–70. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1075506ar>
- Cosso, J., de Vivo, A. R. R., Hein, S., Silvera, L. P. R., Ramirez-Varela, L., & Ponguta, L. A. (2022). Impact of a social-emotional skills-building program (Pisotón) on early development of children in colombia: A pilot effectiveness study. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 111, Article 101898. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2021.101898>
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory Into Practice*, 39(3), 124–130. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2
- Denham, S. A., Bassett, H. H., Zinsser, K., & Wyatt, T. M. (2014). How preschoolers' social-emotional learning predicts their early school success: Developing theory-promoting, competency-based assessments. *Infant and Child Development*, 23(4), 426–454. <https://doi.org/10.1002/icd.1840>
- Eid, A. A. (2020). *Au-delà de l'enseignement, soft skills et rôle de l'école dans la préparation de l'élève à la vie: Étude descriptive menée dans deux établissements scolaires* [Beyond teaching, soft skills and the role of school in preparing students for life: A descriptive study in two schools]. [Master's thesis, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik]. Digital Gate. <https://bit.ly/3LB3IAI>
- Esen-Aygun, H., & Sahin-Taskin, C. (2017). Teachers' views of social-emotional skills and their perspectives on social-emotional learning programs. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(7) 205-215. <https://bit.ly/3AJ9U00>
- Ferreira, M., Reis-Jorge, J., & Batalha, S. (2021). Social and emotional learning in preschool education- a qualitative study with preschool teachers. *International Journal of Emotional Education*, 13(1), 51–66.
- Gilyazova, O. S., Zamoshchansky, I. I., & Vaganova, O. I. (2021). Defining, classifying and developing soft skills in higher education: Competency-based and humanistic approaches. *Universidad y Sociedad*, 13(2), 241–248. <https://bit.ly/3Qbk1AT>
- Heckman, J. J., & Kautz, T. (2012). Hard evidence on soft skills. *Labour Economics*, 19(4), 451-464. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2012.05.014>
- Herawati, R., Tjahjono, H. K., Qamari, I. N., & Wahyuningsih, S. H. (2022). Does teacher's willingness to change enhance professional competence? *European Journal of Educational Research*, 11(3), 1463-1474. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.11.3.1463>
- Lejeune, C. (2019). *Manuel d'analyse qualitative: Analyser sans compter ni classer* [Handbook of qualitative analysis: Analyzing without counting or ranking] (2nd ed.). De Boeck Sup.
- Lyu, W., & Liu, J. (2021). Soft skills, hard skills: What matters most? Evidence from job postings. *Applied Energy*, 300, Article 117307. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apenergy.2021.117307>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Muhimmah, H. A., Budiyo, Mudjito, & Supriyanto. (2022). Inspiring leadership: Values in building the excellent inclusive higher education. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 11(3), 1475-1485. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.11.3.1475>
- Ngang, T. K., Hashim, N. H., & Yunus, H. M. (2015). Novice teacher perceptions of the soft skills needed in today's workplace. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 177, 284-288. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.02.338>
- Ramdani, D., Susilo, H., Suhadi, & Sueb. (2022). The effectiveness of collaborative learning on critical thinking, creative thinking, and metacognitive skill ability: Meta-analysis on biological learning. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 11(3), 1607-1628. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.11.3.1607>
- Sa, N. H., Suyanto, Arifi, A., Putranta, H., & Azizah, A. N. M. (2021). Experiences of participants in teacher professional education on obtaining soft skills: A case study in Indonesia. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 10(1), 313-325. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.10.1.313>
- Salovey, P., & Mayer, J. D. (1990). Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 9(3), 185–211. <https://doi.org/10.2190/dugg-p24e-52wk-6cdg>
- Saygi, M. M., Yildirim, Y., & Taban, F. (2022). The impact of social emotional learning skills on creativity. In A. G. Raj (Ed.), *Creativity as Progressive Pedagogy: Examinations into Culture, Performance, and Challenges* (pp. 175-189). IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-8287-9.ch009>
- Schulz, B. (2008). The importance of soft skills: Education beyond academic knowledge. *Nawa Journal of Communication*, 2(1), 146-154. <https://bit.ly/3djmw6E>

- Shankland, R., & Rosset, E. (2017). Review of brief school-based positive psychological interventions: A taster for teachers and educators. *Educational Psychology Review*, 29(2), 363–392. <https://doi.org/gnttfp>
- Smith, J. A., & Shinebourne, P. (2012). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 73–82). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-005>
- Superior Council of Education, Training and Scientific Research. (2021). *Le métier de l'enseignant au Maroc* [The teaching profession in Morocco]. <https://www.csefrs.ma/?lang=fr>
- Tican, C., & Deniz, S. (2019). Pre-service teachers' opinions about the use of 21st century learner and 21st century teacher skills. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 8(1), 181-197. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.8.1.181>
- Trigueros, R., Padilla, A. M., Aguilar-Parra, J. M., Rocamora, P., Morales-Gázquez, M. J., & López-Liria, R. (2020). The influence of emotional intelligence on resilience, test anxiety, academic stress, and the mediterranean diet. A study with university students. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(6), Article 2071. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17062071>
- Trouchaud, M.-J. (2016). *La violence à l'école* [Violence in schools]. Eyrolles.
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. (2017). *Reimagining life skills and citizenship education in the Middle East and North Africa*. <https://uni.cf/3Q9kMKG>
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. (2022). *UNICEF Morocco country office annual report 2021*. <https://uni.cf/3cCKauy>
- Vienne, P. (2008). *Comprendre les violences à l'école* [Understanding violence in schools]. De Boeck Supérieur. <https://doi.org/10.3917/dbu.vienn.2008.01>
- Webster-Stratton. (2005). *Agressivité chez les jeunes enfants: Services ayant fait leurs preuves dans la réduction de l'agressivité* [Aggression in young children: Services proven to reduce aggression]. Encyclopédie sur le développement des jeunes enfants.
- Wilkinson, R., Marmot, M., & World Health Organization (2004). *Les déterminants sociaux de la santé: Les faits, 2e édition* [Social determinants of health: The facts, 2nd edition]. World Health Organization. Regional Office for Europe. <https://bit.ly/3dsa6cF>
- World Health Organization. (1948). *Constitution of the World Health Organization*. <https://bit.ly/3wOpC9I>