

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research background

Soft skills are psycho-social abilities and interpersonal skills that assist people in making decisions, solving problems, thinking critically, communicating effectively, building healthy relationships, demonstrating leadership and team building qualities, managing time effectively, and coping with life's stress and strain in a healthy and productive manner. Furthermore, these abilities assist us in developing positive relationships with the people with whom we interact. This may imply the ability to form and maintain friendly relationships, which can be extremely beneficial to our mental, social, and professional well-being. It is the combination of these skills is required for behavior change, personality transformation, and making people better employees, as well as opening doors to many opportunities that are not directly related to the subject matter of their jobs.

Over about the past 11 years I had a belief which was surely common among university students that I had to study hard attempting to earn high grades because employers are targeting graduates with outstanding academic records. However, this idea did not seem to capture what was actually happening in organizations, this was experienced when I've tried to track the employment system by working in different sectors, as time went by I figured out that all the professional experiences I've been through require a bunch of valuable soft skills that should be demonstrated in the workplace and that represent core values such as having strong communication skills, being a true problem solver, being proactive, keeping stress and one's emotions under

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control, as most of the time the employee might encounter unexpected roadblocks that he/she should at least be able to come up with workable solutions for any problems thrown his/her way. So I was forced to step outside of my comfort zone and think of alternate ways which will reinforce my communication and social skills by working in various associations and engage actively with the wider community and learn about a teamwork, communication, problem solving, leadership, and task management as well. Being a part of these associations let me grab the chance to involve in auto-development programs that helped me to enhance my knowledge and empowered my practical skills and to manage and involve excellently in the working place that led me to successful job positions afterwards. Furthermore my past work experiences provided me with crucial knowledge, skills, and personal attributes that helped me to clarify, refine my career path and aspirations to think about what areas I am most interested in and helped me work out what I love and what I loathe. In fact, being able to craft a professional set of social skills based on my past jobs and experiences allowed me to understand that to leave a scar, the learner needs to upskill and upgrade himself to go in line with the needs of the labour market. And this was what prompted me to conduct a research on the significance of soft skills in education and how to help students becoming "Career-Ready".

Over the last two decades, there has been an increase in the number of studies focusing on the promotion and evaluation of soft skills in academic institutions. In fact, their valorization has arose from diverse perspectives at the same time. On the one hand, it is a direct outcome of the labor market's increasingly competitive and ever-changing nature (Taylor, 2016).

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Indeed, the significance of soft skills has grown in alongside with the transformation of workplaces.

In fact, the ability to solve new problems, find creative solutions and critically assess them, seek and manage information is prioritized; additionally, interconnectivity and communication are the foundations of several studies have explored the labor market's needs in depth in order to identify the soft skills that should be fostered in order to improve student job placement (Vogler et al., 2018), keeping in mind that the gap between graduates' and employers' perceptions of the importance of soft skills still exists (Dolce, Emanuel, Cisi, & Ghislieri, 2020).

In line with this, USAID (2018) is concerned about the existence of a significant "gap" between graduates' skills, which represents outcomes provided by colleges and prevents graduates from finding work. The skills gap refers to the perceived disparity between curriculums and the skill set sought by businesses, which consists both hard skills and soft skills. Similarly, employers emphasize the significance of career development and counseling, citing skill mismatch and shortage.

According to Anthony P. Carnevale, director of Georgetown University's Centre on Education and the Workforce, higher education must be a job-training system as well, incorporating soft skills into the teaching that will allow both lecturers and students to be on the same page in terms of expectations. Eisner (2010) stated that the relationship between employers, universities, and students is challenging and is dependent on the level of involvement that graduates illustrate based on the available opportunities to advance their professional lives.

Eisner (2010), stated that universities can provide a path to employment by providing appropriate workplace skills, attitudes, and knowledge that employers value.

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Presently, university students in Morocco face high competition from experienced workers, changing skill demands by corporations, and a progressively prevailing global labor force, all of which contribute to an increasingly uncertain and challenging labor market. The realities of the current labor market highlight the significance of career readiness as emphasized by educators and practitioners in establishing various attributes that university graduates should possess in order to meet the requirements of employers in the current workplace.

Nowadays, the term soft skill is used as an umbrella term that covers essential competencies such as life skills, social skills, aptitude skills, and attitude. Personality attributes such as keeping a friendly connection with people, being able to work in a team, and establishing and maintaining professionalism at work are also included. Some may argue that soft skills cannot be taught, however they can be learned and cultivated. Goleman (1998) claims that "all emotional competencies can be fostered with the right practice and that, unlike IQ, they can strengthen throughout life." (pp. 242). This reported enhancement contrasts soft skills, which may be developed at any time in life, with IQ, which remains constant throughout life.

She goes on to say that "no matter how insensitive, bashful, irritable, clumsy, or reckless "No matter how indifferent, shy, hot-tempered, awkward, or irresponsible people are, they can instill soft skills with motivation and a positive atmosphere" (pp. 243). Thus, a teacher's role is to cultivate students' soft skills in their teaching, regardless of the subject they teach, by incorporating soft skills into their teaching process.

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Bonnie Urciuoli proposed in 2016 that "skills" with occupational demands of neoliberal economies, workers are required to "own their skills" and successfully market them to employers.

In describing the role of soft skills, James Heckman, the winner of the "Nobel Prize for Economics in 2000," acknowledges that "Soft Skills predict success in life" (Cinque, 2015). He reveals a link between soft skills and people's personal and professional accomplishments. Soft skills, also known as "applied" skills or "life skills," are considered as a significant differentiating factor for obtaining a job role and attaining success in life in the twenty-first century.

Various studies on the subject have concluded that the value of soft skills should never be undervalued. According to a Harvard University study, soft skills significantly affect 80% of job success while hard skills influence only 20%. All whilst, findings from a study of Fortune 500 CEOs conducted by Stanford Research Institute in partnership with the Carnegie Mellon Foundation confirm that soft skills account for 75% of their long-term and consistent success at work, while hard skills account for 25%. Costin G. (Costin, 2002), for example, claims that the suitable and qualified application of hard skills is based on soft skills. Hard skills are those associated with "product" and "individual," while soft skills are associated with "process" and "community," and he provides a soft skill-hard skill continuum, reminding us to be ready to separate the two.

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A paradigm like this one makes it possible to see the domain in which soft and hard skills overlap, mend, and collaborate. Carl Rogers (Roger C. 1983), in a more in-depth analysis of the educational process's goal, claims that significant learning combines the logical and the intuitive, intellect and feeling, concept and experience, idea and meaning. "We are whole when we learn in this way." This statement clearly emphasizes the fact that absolute learning should entail more than simply acquiring static knowledge.

The environment of graduate recruiting has shifted significantly. The era where candidates were hired based solely on hard technical knowledge as reflected in academic qualifications or work experience has given way to a call for graduates who wield a formidable array of the softer, people-oriented, work-related skills. The importance put on these soft skills, also known as generic abilities, is associated with and reflective of the current trends in graduate recruitment. Like icing on a cake, these soft skills are now required to supplement existing undergraduate education and be utilized across a range of system domains such as work productivity and community life.

In a world where hard and technical skills are straightforward to study, it is more important than ever for Moroccans to develop soft skills as part of their university education. Today, with soft skills' rising importance, Morocco's education system is beginning to explore innovative student-centered approaches rather than merely focusing on the curriculum. Appropriate soft skills are important for a successful career as well as in social relationships in society. These skills are also highly sought after by employers recruiting fresh graduates.

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For Morocco to be competitive in all areas of the economy, individuals must be able to access knowledge flows and acquire the skills to boost the economy and understand their role in a globalized world. As a result of integrating soft skills into the Moroccan bachelor's degree, an in-depth mapping of various skills that are promoted with levels, has appropriate contexts, as well as how and what should be explicitly learned to promote learning systems that place life skills at the core of the 21st century learning agenda at all sparked an in-depth mapping of different skills that are promoted with adequate contexts.

In the Moroccan context, while it is now a well-established fact that employers are increasingly putting more emphasis on career readiness, it is equally important for Moroccan academic institutions to grant more focus on strengthening college students' skills and helping them becoming career ready by providing assistance with their personal and professional development, such as life skills education, career counseling, and assistance with their transition from school to work. Furthermore, Morocco intends to assist in the establishment of career, training centers, and courses for trainers who want to significantly boost resources for the benefit of the economy and increase young people's employability through degrees or certification programs. As a result, classroom soft skills are transcribed into real-world attitudes and actions.

This present study is expected to provide an opportunity to raise awareness among college administrators, professors and career counselors, about how employers assess college graduates' work-readiness and the suitable personal attributes and general business competencies needed to sufficiently prepare students for employment and becoming ' Career ready'.

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More importantly, this study aims at exploring how to prepare young people for their transition to their post-secondary school lives and to empower them to be successful in their lives and careers. In other words, it is predicted that this research will increase in the quality of career counseling in Morocco that will lead to an increase in young people's career readiness.

1.1. Purpose of the study

This research will be conducted in order to explore how the lecturers, professionals, career counselors and trainers view the significance of soft skills in education and whether what they claim they do for their instructional activities to integrate soft skills are comprehended by the students.

The research questions included the following:

1. How do stakeholders view the importance of soft skills in education?
2. What is the lecturers' role in teaching students' soft skills and helping them becoming 'career-ready'?
3. What is the Career counselors' role in strengthening students' soft skills in Morocco?
4. Do students possess the soft skills to be successful in the workplace?
5. How can college graduates' soft skills and career-readiness be assessed?
6. What is the Career Counseling issue in higher education in Morocco?

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1. What is the importance of Career Services in Morocco and how these Career Centers help participants acquire needed work readiness and soft skills?

1.2. Significance of Research

Firstly, it provides an opportunity to raise awareness among stakeholders about the significance of soft skills in education and career readiness.

Secondly, this research may provide a greater understanding of which soft skills employers value.

Thirdly, the study's findings are expected to result in strategies to improve soft skill development while students are still in college and increase in the quality of career counseling in Morocco that will lead to an increase in young people's career readiness.

1.3. Definition of terms

In the context of this study, the following terms are defined:

a) Soft skills

To have a common language, the definition of soft skills used throughout this study is according to Pachauri and Yadav (2014) who stated that soft skills are personal traits that enhance a person's interactions, job performance, and career viewpoints.

b) Career readiness

To have a common language, the definition of career readiness used throughout this study is according to Atlay & Harris, (2000) they defined it as the level to which graduates are career ready is regarded as a predictor of future job performance, success, promotional opportunities and lifelong career management.

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