

## Soft Skills Development among EFL Students at Batna-2 University: Knowledge and Skills beyond Language Learning.



Khawla SAIDOUNI

University of Chahid Motefa Benboulaïd Batna-2 University, Algeria, [k.saidouni@univ-batna2.dz](mailto:k.saidouni@univ-batna2.dz)

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**Abstract:**

*Teaching in the 21st century is a huge challenge to make good students with skills and expertise. This entails higher education institutions to cope with all the changes that occur within the different dimensions of life. To keep up with the development of science, technology, and the demands of globalization, high-level soft skills are needed for a successful life and career for students. Actually, there is a need to cultivate the soft skills that are crucial for personal growth, social interaction, and occupation success. In this regard, it is important for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners to develop both language hard skills and soft skills to engage effectively and successfully in their future careers. The aim of the current research is to find out whether the implemented activities in EFL classes support the development of soft skills. It also targets to explore the usefulness of soft skills for future career and professional development. Accordingly, the present paper employs a quantitative method of research. To reach the study aims, the needed data were collected using a survey questionnaire which was randomly administered to 90 Master two students. The findings of the study deliver significant results concerning soft skills development and offer some practical suggestions regarding soft skill inclusion in the EFL classroom.*

**Keywords:** soft skills; EFL teaching; teaching activities; 21<sup>st</sup> century; EFL students.

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\* Corresponding author: khawla saidouni, [k.saidouni@univ-batna2.dz](mailto:k.saidouni@univ-batna2.dz).

### **Introduction:**

Due to the changing educational scenario, curriculum used in teaching at universities had been changed and continually updated in order to meet the local and global needs and challenges. In this era of globalization and technological advancement, teachers are required to prepare graduates who are able to incorporate the knowledge and skills related to the profession with the soft skills that are indispensable for future career. To get a competitive edge, learners have to give more importance to their soft skills to reveal their true potential. Musa, Mufti, Latiff, and Amin (2012) claim that the "21st century employers are looking for graduates who possess soft skills that include responsibility, self-confidence, social and communication skills, flexibility, team-spiritedness, good work attitude, self-motivation and self-management" (p. 565). Actually, many researchers claim that the contribution of hard skills to the individual's success is of 15%, yet the 85% is attributed to the soft skills. The soft skills include problem-solving, critical-thinking, innovative thinking, leadership, creativity, collaboration, communication, analytical skills, decision-making, motivation, and the like. However, the development of soft skills requires regular orientations and trainings from the part of teachers.

In this globalised world, English language has become the language of intercultural communication. Teaching English in the 21<sup>st</sup> requires a mastery of intra- and interpersonal skills. To say it differently, there is a need to cultivate the soft skills that are crucial for personal growth, social interaction, and occupation success. In this regard, it is important for English as foreign language (EFL) learners to develop both language (hard skills), and soft skills to engage effectively and successfully in their future careers. Coaching, tutoring, special seminars, and teaching activities directed to EFL learners can highly and efficiently contribute in enhancing the quality of soft skills. As a matter of fact, sometimes students are not aware of the need to have soft skills into their curricula and syllabi (Porter, 2007). Furthermore, even though the Bologna Declaration recommends a pedagogical model which focus on the necessities of a knowledge-based society, we can notice that higher education is still based on the transmission of knowledge (Pereira & Costa, 2017).

In Algerian universities, the educational system in Algeria targets to develop students' interpersonal skills along with their intellectual academic abilities. Nevertheless, during the teaching and learning processes little attention is given to the development of soft skills. Indeed, the majority of teachers place more emphasis on the academic achievement of students rather than their progress in soft skills. Accordingly, it is crucial to investigate the situation in our university, and in the department of English Language and Literature at Batna-2 University, in particular for the sake of developing programs that fit with the demands of the globally competitive environment. In this regard, the present study is targeted to

identify the relevant soft skills developed and acquired when undergoing the EFL classroom activities, and their usefulness and necessity for their future occupations. To achieve the study aims, the following research questions are stated:

1. What are the most frequent activities practiced in EFL classes that give major contributions to students' soft skills development?
2. What are the students' perceptions towards the development of soft skills through EFL classroom activities?
3. To what extent are soft skills useful for EFL students in their future career?

The assumption of this research was that when master two students complete their studies, the majority of them find themselves in a situation that requires their knowledge of expertise i.e. hard skills, their language knowledge and most of all, their soft skills. For that reason, it was expected that the EFL master two students who respond to the survey were in a position to use their own soft skills or to be conscious of their lack in their behaviour.

## **1. Literature Review:**

### **a. The Importance of Soft Skills in Teaching:**

The word « Skill » refers to the individual's ability to do things in a clever way. In other words, it is about the ability to use and practice knowledge effectively readily in performance. Actually, there are two major types of skills which are soft skills and hard skills. Soft skills are considered as subjective skills that are difficult to quantify whereas hard skills are teachable abilities or skill sets that are easy to quantify. Indeed, soft skills are different from "hard skills." The hard skills are those skills that are easily defined and evaluated as well as they are learned in classrooms.

The term Soft skills is coined back to 1990's (Collins, 2018), and it is also known as interpersonal or people skills (Bartel, 2018). The Oxford Advanced Learner English Dictionary (2019) *defines soft skills* as "personal qualities that enable someone to interact well with other people". Soft skills are necessary for everyday life. They are non-technical, non-academic competencies that support their performance in academic and career settings or specific social contexts. According to Robles (2012), "Soft skills are character traits, attitudes and behaviours-rather than technical aptitude or knowledge. Soft skills are the intangible, non-technical, personality-specific skills that determine one's strengths as a leader, facilitator, mediator, and negotiator" (p.457). Bartel (2018) goes on to claim that:

I have found it useful to define it similarly to the term "appropriacy" in linguistics, namely, a range of personal

skills and behaviours: "self-awareness and cultural awareness as well as interpersonal skills, including verbal and nonverbal communication, that follow or reflect expected polite behaviour, especially in the business or workplace context" Soft skills can be said to incorporate all aspects of generic skills that include the cognitive elements associated with non-academic skills" (p. 80 ).

Soft skills can be said to incorporate all aspects of generic skills that include the cognitive elements associated with non-academic skills. Soft skills are identified to be the most critical skills in the current global job- market especially in a fast moved era of technology. The reorientation of education which is one trust of education for sustainability also relates the importance of these so-called soft skills. In 1997, the World Health Organization (WHO) outlined a core set of ten soft skills: self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, effective communication, interpersonal relationship skills, stress-coping techniques, and emotion-focused coping techniques. In 2000, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2000) published a report offering a conceptual basis for a soft skills approach to education. It does not only reinforce the definition of soft skills as psychosocial abilities, but it also proposes an educational framework in which soft skills are grouped into four categories:

- ❖ Cognitive skills (learning to know): it includes critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving.
- ❖ Self-management skills (learning to be): it involves self-awareness, self-confidence, self-esteem, and coping skills.
- ❖ Good citizenship skills (learning to live together): it is about living and working with others, using the interpersonal and social skills of communication, negotiating, assertiveness, cooperation, and empathy.
- ❖ Practical (learning to do): it refers to manual or physical actions that display gross and fine motor skills or control of tools and machines and the like.

Other researchers have listed and classified the soft skills in many different ways. According to Mangrulkar, Whitman, and Posner (2001), soft skills can be sorted into three main categories: (a) social or interpersonal skills that contains communication, assertiveness, negotiation, cooperation, and empathy, (b) cognitive skills which includes problem-solving, decision-making, critical thinking, and self-reflection, and (c) emotion-focused coping skills that comprises stress management, emotional self-regulation, self-management, and self-monitoring. They demonstrated how each category complements, overlaps, and reinforces the

others. Nieragden (2000) categorises the soft skills into four groups as mentioned below:

- ❖ Interaction: it covers attitude awareness, conflict handling, and tolerance.
- ❖ Self-Management: it consists of decision-making, willingness to learn, self-discipline and resistance to stress.
- ❖ Communication: it includes listening skills, presentation skills.
- ❖ Organization: among the skills involved in this category is problem solving.

On the other hand, according to Shakir (2009, pp. 310-311) the following skills can be defined as soft skills:

- ❖ Communication skills: it is about expressing thoughts and arguments with clarity.
- ❖ Critical thinking and problem solving: this refers to the ability of analyzing, evaluating and applying knowledge.
- ❖ Ability to cooperate with others: it requires the individuals' ability to work in a team, interact and cooperate with other people coming from different backgrounds in terms of society, education and culture.
- ❖ Lifelong learning and information management skills: it is about the ability/skill to learn and search and process relevant information.
- ❖ Ethics and professional moral: it is the ability to apply moral standards in context of professional practice.
- ❖ Leadership skills: it is the ability to lead and understand the leadership roles.

Developing soft skills can provide important character-building qualities: self-esteem, social capacity, empathy, critical thinking, and problem-solving and informed decision-making, including being open and willing to revise solutions and choices as and when required. Consequently, appropriate soft skills enable individuals to adapt positively to life's challenges (World Health Organization, 1997) by offering a comprehensive framework that transcends varied range of life issues: substance abuse, good citizenship, national identity, sexual health and well-being, the building a support network, preparing for the future, and anger management (Ozmete, 2011). Hence, the young can develop into responsible and productive adults capable of dealing with everyday challenges (Hanbury & Malti, 2011), and those with higher levels of soft skills will be better at problem-solving and securing employment (Gladwell, 2011).

Moreover, Patil, Mitra, and Mhavan (2013) noted that soft skills help adolescents integrate knowledge, opinions, and values into healthy behaviors that become second nature; otherwise, they may experience difficulties with decision-making and isolation in dealing with life's stressors in future (Mofrad et al., 2013). Arat (2014) similarly concluded that soft skills benefitted university students through creativity, problem-solving, interpersonal communication, and writing and

speaking skills *before* embarking on their careers, better preparing them for the inevitable challenges they will face in their personal and professional lives. Likewise, Rendevski and Abdelhadi (2017) observed that physics students at the United Arab Emirates Higher Colleges of Technology with soft skills performed better.

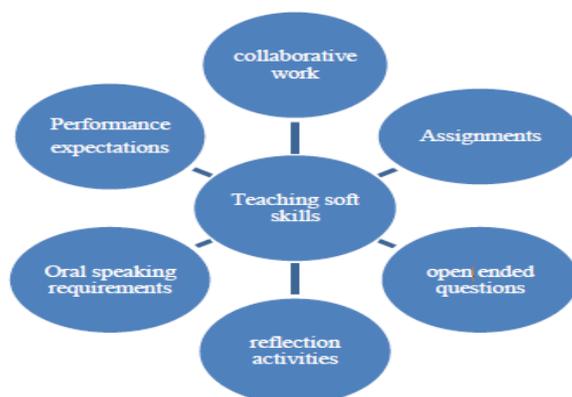
#### **b. Teaching Soft Skills in Higher Education:**

In this rapidly changing world, policy-makers, managers, and teachers as well have encountered many challenges in every dimension of life (socially, economically, and technologically). Along this vein, teachers have to prepare well-educated students with soft skills of the 21st century. Indeed, the influence of a good teaching process is considered as a major indicator of economic well-being of society. To say it differently, we cannot ignore the fact that the teachers' quality determines the quality of teaching, and it highly contributes to the development of the country. The Bologna system, which has been adopted by many universities all around the world, and Algeria is no exception, declares the importance of accommodating the academic curricula with the current economic and social reality. Gopi Krishna (2014) claims that "The 21st century demands the explicit integration of learning strategies, digital competences and career abilities." Accordingly, higher education institutions in general, and EFL classrooms in particular, have a duty to provide learners with the adequate practices that emphasise on learning and developing, among other things, problem – solving, creativity, motivation, critical and analytical thinking, collaboration, self-control, and cross-cultural skills.

When EFL teaching and learning, learners can develop communicative competence, problem-solving, critical and analytical thinking, leadership, teamwork, presentation, reflection skills through many different activities such as reading, writing, preparing projects using power point presentations. Moreover, discussions, debates, portfolios, reflective journals or diaries, role plays can effectively contribute in the development of students' soft skills. For Bartel (2018), "Each of these skill types—self- and cultural awareness and communication—can be addressed within the context of a language class, and each plays a role in establishing appropriate personal relationships, in the classroom or community as well as at work". ( p. 80)

In EFL classes, soft skills can be taught for the sake of preparing the learners for their effective personal and professional development. Since English language is extensively used all over the world, this provides EFL graduates with job opportunities. Therefore, EFL students should be trained in soft skills to help them apply for jobs or start own projects after graduation. By and large, teachers focus on three main methods when teaching soft skills. The first method is known as Interactive teaching which requires well-designed curriculum, and skilled teachers.

In this method, teachers act as instructors and facilitators who provide opportunities for experience, practice, reinforcement and reflection. Hiring a trainer in workplace settings is the second method of teaching soft skills. On-the-job training work, both soft and hard skills are taught by hiring trainers and instructors to improve workers' performance. The third approach focuses on teaching soft skills in the classes, besides regular curriculum, to improve students' performance in the soft skills. The method based on participation in experiential activities such as simulations, collaboration, group work, role-plays or public speaking. Typically, this method is used in the United States and in some European and Asian countries. The diagram below shows the best practices for teaching soft skills in classrooms:



**Figure1.** Best practices for teaching soft skills in classrooms (Sekhar, 2019, p.115)

## 2. Research Methodology:

As aforementioned, this research is an attempt to investigate Master2 students' views and perceptions towards the contribution of classroom activities in developing soft skills. To do so, the researcher selected the appropriate research approach, method, population and sampling, and the data gathering tools. According to Cohen et al. (2018),

Methodology concerns how we find out about the phenomenon, the approach to be used, the principles which underpin it and the justification for using the kind of research approach adopted, the type of study to be conducted, how the research is undertaken (with its associated issues of kinds of research, sampling, instrumentation, canons of validity etc.) (p. 186).

Commonly, the communicative language teaching approach is implemented in the English language teaching classes as a theoretical basis. Among the typical activities adopted in the department of English at Batna-2 University are role- plays, interviews, group work, information gap, opinion sharing and the like. These activities are shown in the article as the activities developing, besides language skills, soft skills.

**a. Research Method:**

The current study applies the principles of quantitative approach for it aims to describe and analyse the contribution of classroom activities towards the soft skills development. In this vein, the study has undergone the exploratory and descriptive methods of research.

**b. Population and Sampling:**

The targeted population of this study was Master 2 students enrolled in the department of English Language and Literature at Batna-2 University. They are 241 divided into three options: didactics, Language and culture, and applied linguistics. Since it is not practical to conduct a research on the whole population, a representative sample was selected. In this respect, we adhered to a non-probability sampling method using the simple random sampling technique where 90 participants were involved in the study. This sampling technique enabled the researcher to claim that the obtained findings could be generalized.

**c. Data Gathering Tools:**

In line with the aim of the study, a survey questionnaire was used to collect the data. According to Kapur (2018), the goal of surveys "... is to discover the relative incidence, distribution and interrelations of sociological and psychological variables. Survey research is mostly devoted to the study of characteristics of the populations under investigation" (p.17). The researcher adopted a questionnaire developed by Hadiyanto, Noferdiman, Moehamin, and Yuliusman, (2017). To divulge students' perspectives towards the development of soft skills basing on classroom activities, a questionnaire was addressed to 90 Master 2 students in the department of English Language Literature at Batna-2 University. To know the participants' views, the questionnaire was constructed in the form of 5 Likert scale. The options were as follows: always, often, sometimes, seldom, and often/ strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The questionnaire applied in this research were of closed- ended items including four sections. The first section of the questionnaire involves background information (gender and age); the second section was about the frequency of learning activities implemented in EFL classes, section three focused on the soft skills developed communication skills, information technology skills, problem – solving and critical thinking skills. Data analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.

### 3. Analysis and Findings of the Study:

#### Section one: Background Information

Table 2. *Students' Gender and Age*

Gender	22-24	25-27	28-30	Total	Percentage
Male	8	0	2	10	11.11%
Female	58	17	5	80	88.89%
Total	66	17	7	90	100%

The above table shows that the participants' ages range from 22 to 30 years old. The vast majority of participants are females with 88.89% meanwhile only 11.11% of the participants are males.

#### Section two: The frequency of learning activities implemented in EFL classes

Table 3. *Learning Activities Used in EFL Classes*

Activities	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Discussion/debates	67.78%	13.33%	16.67%	2,22%	0%
Diaries	0%	0%	0%	1,11%	98.89%
Portfolios	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Projects	47.78%	44.44%	7,78%	0%	0%
Presentations	77.78%	12.22%	10%	0%	0%
Role plays	0%	0%	13.33%	23.33%	63.33%

As shown in table 3, the widely used activities among EFL students are discussions and debates, presentations, and projects. More than a half of participants 67.78% advocate that they always focus on discussions and debates in classroom activities. Moreover, the remaining participants choose the options usually 13.33%, and sometimes 16.67%. By contrast, only 2.22% of participants proclaim that teachers seldom implement discussion and debates in their teaching process. Concerning the integration of projects, the vast majority of participants claim that they always 47.78%, and usually 44.44% do projects as activities in EFL classes. Meanwhile, Only 7.78% sometimes do projects. As far as the presentations are concerned, a significant number of participants 77.78% state that they always do presentations in EFL classrooms. In addition, the remaining students usually 12.22% and sometimes 10% do this activity. As well as, 13.33% of the participants sometimes use role-play activities in EFL classes, yet the rest of students choose seldom 23.33% and never 63.33%. Conversely, almost all the participants claim that they never use reflective diaries or journals (98.89%), and portfolios (100%).

#### Section three: Soft skills development in EFL Classes

##### a. Communication Skills:

- a.1. Able to communicate or present ideas clearly and effectively.
- a.2. Able to convince either orally or in writing with the main points systematically.
- a.3. Able to absorb the main ideas and detailed information from oral and written sources.
- a.4. Able to respond with a clear and straight forward.
- a.5. Capable of reading comprehension and use English both in oral and written presentation.

This section aims to explore the students' views concerning the development of communicative competence among EFL students using classroom activities. As indicated in Figure 2, the majority of participants strongly agree 13.33% and agree 42.22% with the fact that classroom activities enables them to communicate their ideas effectively and clearly. However, 33.33% of informants remain neutral, and 11.11%, they disagree with idea. In addition, a few number of participants confirms (strongly agree, 11.11%; agree 22.22%) their ability of convincing others in a systematic way via speaking and writing. By contrast, more than a half of informants 54.44 % neither agree nor disagree, and 12.22% disagree/strongly disagree 11.11% with this clue. As well as, the students show their ability to absorb the main ideas from oral or written sources (strongly agree 33.33%, agree 22.22%); however, 32.22% of participants are neutral, and 12.22% disagree. When the students asked about their ability to respond clearly and straight forward, the majority of them strongly agree 23.33%, and agree 32.22%, but 23.33% of them disagree with this fact. Furthermore, the majority of informants strongly agree 23.33%, and agree 32.22% about the fact that they use English during presentations.

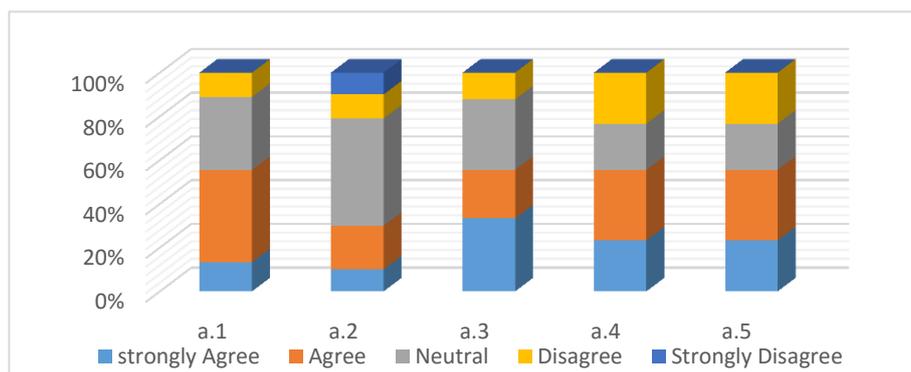


Figure2. The Development of Communication Skills among EFL Students.

**b. Information Technology skills**

- b.1.** Able to search for and select the appropriate information through IT such as files, CDs, Internet, Online Journal, etc. of various sources on the internet to complete the task that has been given properly.
- b.2.** Able to present the assignment using interesting power point, graph, chart, image, number, etc.
- b.3.** Able to develop the structure of presentation by using paragraph style, page number, and outline well.
- b.4.** Able to use software or application feature such as query database, search engine, spread sheet, e-dictionary, e-sticky note, etc to improve the learning efficiency maximally.
- b.5.** Able to present using polite language by combining text, graph, chart, picture, video and number well.

The main aim of this section is to know to what extent the classroom activities contribute in enhancing the students' skills in information technology. The results in Figure 3 show that a notable number of informants strongly agree 24.44% and agree 42.22% with their ability to search for the suitable information using different technological tools such as internet, and online journals. Whereas, the remaining participants choose neutral 11.11%, disagree 13.33%, and strongly disagree 8.98%. Another striking point is that the informants confirm their ability to prepare assignments using interesting power point, graphs, and charts choosing strongly agree 22.22% and agree 44.44%. The majority of participants (strongly agree 33.33%, and agree 21.11%) also show their ability to develop the structure of presentation. Though, a considerable number of participants 32.22% are neutral. With regard to the use of software and application features, the majority of participants express their disagreement (disagree 33.33% and strongly disagree 11.11%) with this view, yet 33.33% remain neutral with this notion. Additionally, a high proportion of participants 55.56% remain neutral regarding the indication of the ability to present by combining the text with the graph, chart, picture etc.

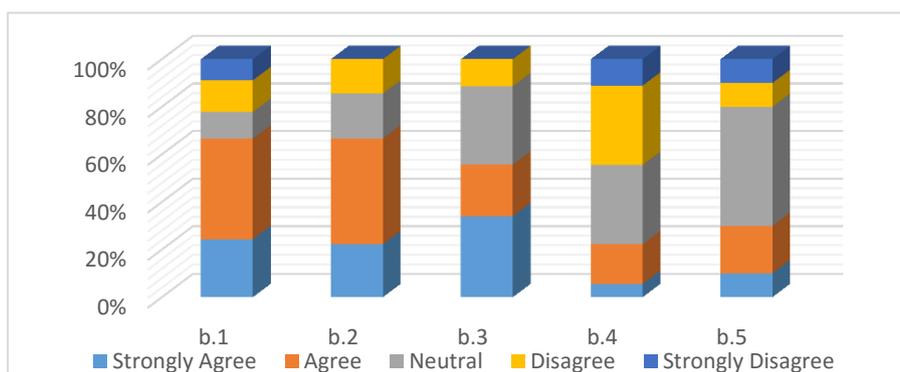


Figure3. The Development of Information Technology among EFL Students.

**c. Problem- solving and Critical thinking Skills**

- c.1. Able to identify and analyze the problems in difficult situations and make a right evaluation.
- c.2. Able to expand and improve thinking skills such as explanation, analysis and evaluation.
- c.3. Able to solve difficult problems by making comparisons with similar problems and find an analogy from reading or own experience appropriately.
- c.4. Able to make a conclusion based on facts and figures.
- c.5. Able to identify problems, use different methods and sources to analyze problems.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the respondents have different views concerning the development of problem-solving and critical thinking skills when they involve in the various classroom activities. A significant number of participants (strongly agree 7.78% and agree 47.78%) express their agreement towards their ability to identify and analyse problems in difficult situations and make the appropriate evaluation. By contrast, a few number of students disagree 8.89%, and the rest of respondents 35.56% neither agree nor disagree with the idea. When students asked about their ability of expanding and improving the major thinking skills such as explanations, analysis, and evaluation, a significant number of the informants strongly agree 22.22% and agree 46.76%, whereas small number of participants disagree 14% and strongly disagree 7.78%. As well as 20% of the respondents remain neutral with this indication.

In addition, a slight number of students agree 11.11% with the fact that they can solve difficult problems, and compare them with other similar problems appropriately nevertheless 22% of the students disagree. Whereas, more than half of participants 66.67% prefer to choose a neutral position concerning this clue. As far as the students' ability of making conclusions basing on facts and figures is concerned when they engage in classroom activities, a considerable number of informants agree 44.44% with this fact, though some other participants 38% disagree and 6.67% strongly disagree. Nevertheless, the rest of respondents choose a neutral position. Furthermore, it is clear from the figure below that a substantial number of respondents 55.56% show their agreement in regard to their ability to identify problems using different methods and sources to analyse problems whilst a slight significant number disagree 14%, and strongly disagree 7.78%. Meanwhile, 22.22% of participants take a neutral point of view.

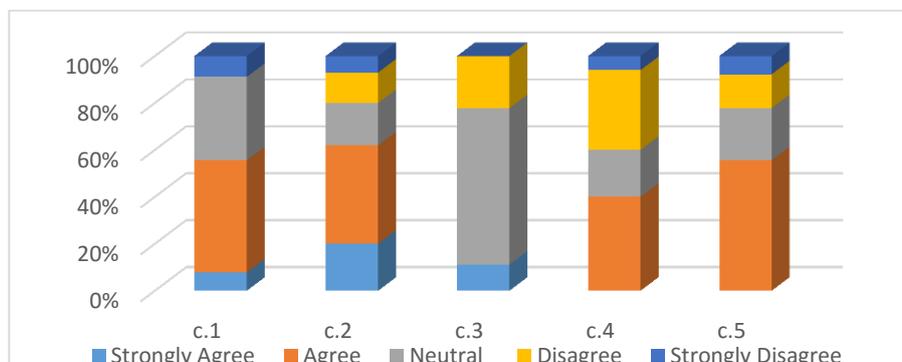


Figure4. The Development of Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking Skills among EFL Students.

**d. Team Work Skills**

- d.1. Able to work together and have a serious conversation with the team, and respect the different perspectives of different races, ethnicities, religions, etc.
- d.2. Able to resolve conflicts and provide constructive feedback.
- d.3. Able to maintain team motivation effectively and offer ideas to achieve better results.
- d.4. Able to contribute as team members or team leaders in completing tasks or projects.
- d.5. Able to stimulate team members to contribute to teamwork, accommodate team members' contributions and combine the team members opinion well.

As illustrated in Figure 5, the respondents agree and disagree with varying degrees concerning the development of teamwork skills. The vast majority of respondents (strongly agree 58.89% and agree 18.89%) ponder that they have the ability to work in a team, conduct serious conversations, and respect the different perspectives. However, a substantial number of responses are varied between neutral 15.56% and disagree 6.67%. Moreover, a considerable number of participants strongly agree 40% and disagree 15.56% with the fact that they can resolve conflicts and provide contrastive feedback. Still, 33.33% take a neutral position, and a slight number of participants 11.11% disagree with this notion. In addition to that more than a half of participants show their agreement (strongly agree 31.11% and agree 24.44%) concerning the participants' ability of maintaining team motivation effectively and offering ideas to reach better results. By contrast, a slight considerable number of participants 33.33% show their neutral point of view, and 11% disagree with the notion. Another striking point is that a noteworthy

number of respondents show their agreement (strongly agree 18.89, and agree 47.78%) concerning their ability to be a team member or leader to complete projects. Nevertheless, 22.22% favour a neutral position, and the remaining 11.11% disagree with this clue. With regard to statement d.5, about half of participants 44.44% choose a neutral point of view concerning their ability to stimulate team members to contribute in a work. Still, 11.11%, 22.22%, and 22.22%, strongly agree, agree, and disagree, respectively.

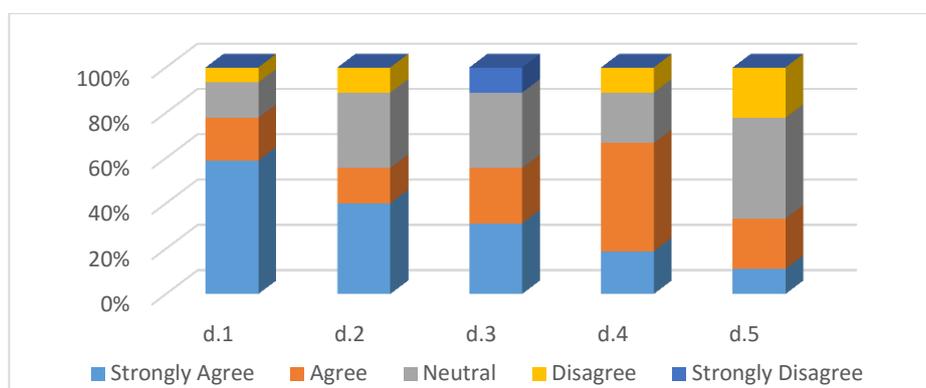
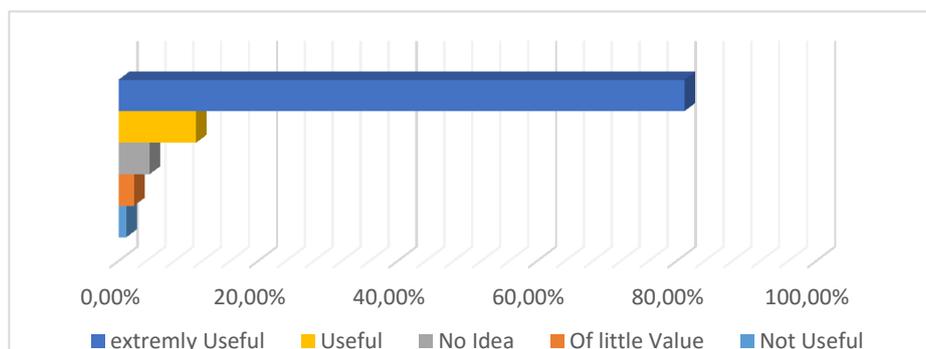


Figure5. The Development of Team Work Skills among EFL Students.

#### Section four: The necessity and usefulness of soft skills

##### a. To what extent do you think soft skills are useful for future career?

As denoted in figure 6, the vast majority of participants 81.11% think that the soft skills are extremely useful and useful 11.11% for EFL students and their future career. Nevertheless, 2.22% of respondents think it has a little value and 1.11% of them think it is not useful whilst 4.44% of the participants have no idea.



*Figure6. The Usefulness of Soft Skills for Future Career*

**Conclusion:**

The significance of this research lies in its importance to provide a valuable contribution in developing the quality of English instruction for EFL teachers as well as for the socio-economic improvement. The study illustrated the students' ability to perceive their personal skills in a reliable way since it is connected to classroom activities. This paper has revealed that Master two students in the department of English at Batna-2 University realized that learning English activities do not only develop language skills, but also soft skills. Besides, the students confirmed the usefulness of soft skills in their life. Among the activities which are frequently practiced in EFL classes are presentations, projects, discussions and debates, and sometimes offered to be involved in role-plays. Nevertheless, portfolios and diaries were never used as activities in EFL classrooms. According to the students' views, the most developed soft skills due to their engagement in classroom activities are communication skills and teamwork skills while some aspects of problem-solving and critical thinking are still under development. In this respect, EFL teachers in the department of English at Batna-2 University are required to include diaries or reflective journals, role-plays, and portfolios as additional activities in their classes to enhance the development of soft skills mainly, critical and creative thinking, leadership, teamwork and reflective skills. In point of fact, the focus should be also placed on English communication competence since it is considered as an essential aspect in the academic and career life of EFL students.

Actually, some of the aspects of soft skills are already exist in EFL classes, however; there is a need to emphasise more on the other elements that are scarce or absent, and increase students' awareness of their importance. Accordingly, the educational programmes should enable students to develop the needed knowledge and skills (soft and hard), and match the prerequisite outcomes with a specific job. To put it another way, higher education institutions are in need to train students to use the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills along with the hard skills. Therefore, policy makers in education, syllabi designers, and teachers should integrate the needed soft skills in EFL educational setting and link them to the students' level of education for better training. For that reason, further research is necessary concerning the adequate implementation of soft skills in higher education institutions generally and EFL classes, particularly without neglecting the importance of hard skills. Ultimately, future investigation should also emphasise on exploring the most effective approaches for learning soft skills.

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