

Soft Skills for Employability from Academics Perspectives

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Abstract-Critical Thinking skills sum up the proficiencies needed for employment. Critical Thinking skills especially Soft skills are identified as a job barrier in Malaysia. Employers assert that our graduates lack Soft skills, thus in 2006, the Malaysian government introduces and encourages the use of Soft skills, which include communication skills, problem-solving and thinking skills, continuous learning skills and information management skills, work in group skills, leadership skills, entrepreneurship skills, and professional ethics. This study focuses on the Soft skills for graduates' employability through three objectives: to investigate the Soft skills needed by graduates, to determine whether graduates have the soft skills required for employment and whether these skills are being taught at university. The research methodology consists of a survey aimed at lecturers at the Language Centre, National Defence University of Malaysia, using a mixed-method approach. The online survey contains both closed and open-ended questions and is analyzed using SPSS v.25.0 and manual content analysis. Results indicate that the most desired Soft skills are Communication Skills, Problem Solving and Thinking Skills, and Teamwork Skills. Lecturers agree that graduates must be equipped with the Soft skills needed for employment and they perceive that these skills are taught at the university. The lecturers agree on the importance of Soft skills, and this is supported by the overall findings. This research suggests that higher educational institutions should teach Soft skills either through a course specifically for Soft skills or integrated into courses designed to meet employers' needs.

Keywords: Critical Thinking, Soft Skills, Affective Domain, Graduates' Employability, Higher Education Institution

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INTRODUCTION

One of the primary goals of education in Malaysia has always been the growth of Critical thinking (CT). Through the introduction of Soft skills, the Malaysian government has promoted the application of these skills in institutions of higher learning. The administration has recognized that increasing human capital is the most critical aspect in realizing Vision 2020. The holistic acquisition of information, skills, and attitude is referred to as "human capital development," and it is complimented by "Soft skills" talents. Personality qualities, social graces, linguistic proficiency, personal routines, and teamwork are collectively referred to as Soft skills or generic abilities.

Prior to the introduction of soft skills, the New Curriculum for Primary School (KBSR) and the New Curriculum for Secondary School (KBSM) have provided Malaysian students with problem-solving and, creative and critical thinking instruction, but it was not comprehensive. As a result, critical and creative thinking became the primary educational objective in Malaysia. Through an educational programme that includes curriculum and co-curricular activities which encompasses knowledge, skills, norms, values, cultural elements, and beliefs to help develop a student fully with respect to the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional aspects; as well as to inculcate and develop desirable moral values and to transmit knowledge; the Malaysian Education Act (1996) has also placed a focus on thinking skills.

CT was introduced into Malaysia's education system in the '90s. It began in primary schools where CT was integrated into Maths and Science. As mandated by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), the integration of CT in Malaysian higher education has been implemented since 2008. After more than 20 years of teaching CT, it is said to be one of the most quoted reasons for graduates' unemployment. Employers claimed that graduates lacked CT skills particularly Soft skills even though CT has been embedded into the school curriculum since the '90s and reached the tertiary level in 2008. This also raised the issue of the "skill gap" where what is being taught in higher education institutions does not correspond to what is required in the working world (Makasiranondh et al., 2011; Bhatnagar, 2021; Saunders & Bajjaly, 2022). Despite decades of emphasis on Soft skill development, Soft skill integration in Malaysia is still not at an optimal level (Tan et al., 2021). In addition, the Malaysian government has encouraged the use of CT skills in higher education institutions through the introduction of Soft skills, which include communication skills, problem-solving and thinking skills, continuous learning skills and information management skills, work in group skills, leadership skills, entrepreneurship skills, and professional ethics (Konting et al., 2008; Shakir, 2009). The seven (7) Soft skills are also said to be embedded in the syllabus and taught at Institutes of Higher Learning in Malaysia (Shakir, 2009).

This study focuses on the Soft skills for graduates' employability through three objectives: to investigate the Soft skills required by new employees in an educational organization, to determine whether new employees have the Soft skills needed for employment from employers' perspectives and

whether Soft skills are being taught at university. In general, it plans to assess whether lecturers understand what Soft skills are and whether they teach these important skills to students in their classrooms.

Research Objectives

This study examines whether lecturers are familiar with Soft skills at the university through three objectives:

RO1: To investigate the Soft skills needed by new employees or future graduates in an educational organization from lecturers' perspectives.

RO2: To examine whether new employees or future graduates have the Soft skills needed for employment from lecturers' perspectives, and

RO3: To determine whether Soft skills are being taught at the university.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the Soft skills needed by new employees or future graduates in an educational organization from the lecturers' perspectives?

RQ2: Do the new employees or future graduates have the Soft skills needed for employment from the lecturers' perspectives, and

RQ3: Are the Soft skills being taught at university?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking (CT) is one of the most discussed higher-order thinking skills (Butler, 2012; Halpern, 2013) and is seen to play a vital role in logical reasoning, decision-making, and problem-solving. It is also said to be one of higher education's most highly valued 21st-century skills (Leão & Ferreira, 2022; Nielsen et al., 2022; O'Reilly et al., 2022). Elder and Paul (1997) defined CT as the ability of thinkers to control their own thinking. Instead of being spoon-fed and relying entirely on textbooks and other people's opinions or internet resources, CT skills allow students to come up with solutions on their own, even if they are basic, and to use reasoning skills to explain their solutions. However, due to our current education system which is perceived to be excessively too exam-oriented and theory-based, potential employers frequently complained about graduates' ability to think critically, and their lack of English proficiency restricts their ability to develop unique and creative ideas (Norshima, 2011).

CT is associated to commonly identified twenty-first-century abilities such as metacognition, motivation, and creativity (Lai, 2011). With the growth of technology, which has resulted in the

globalization of the world, CT has become an essential and vital skill that one must possess both during their educational journey and at work. It is also a necessary talent for students since it allows them to connect with their cognitive abilities and spiritual questions, as well as in analyzing people, policies, and organizations, thereby preventing societal problems (Hatcher & Spencer, 2005; Duron et al., 2006). There have been numerous studies that link CT to the employability (Gao, 2022; Wafi et al., 2022; Waterworth et al., 2022).

The public is becoming more conscious of the importance of students developing higher-order thinking skills (CT skills) to cope with the demands of modern society (Underbakke et al., 1993). As a result, it is possible to conclude that even society's standards of CT had improved. The need of developing critical thinking abilities has been widely publicized, even to the most insignificant elements of society, to the point that it has become a crucial criterion that should be ingrained in everyone. The ability to think clearly and critically has become a must and a crucial trait even for future generations to be able to cope with current society.

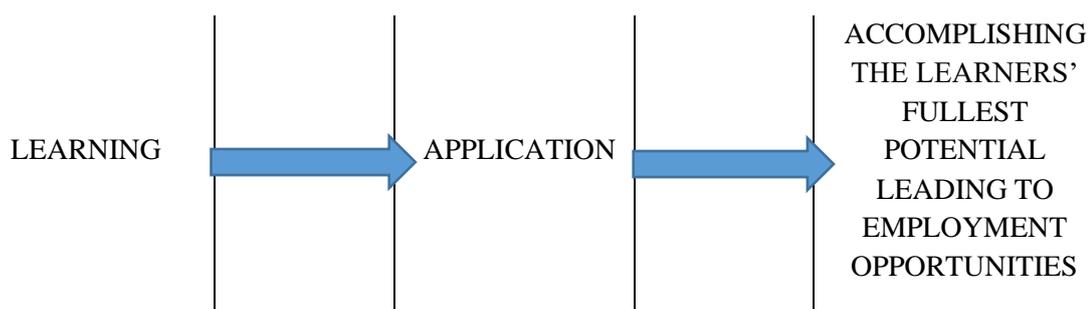


Figure 1. Theoretical framework: Pragmatic Learning
Adopted from Dewey (1916)

According to the Theory of Pragmatic Learning, students must first learn (the Soft skills) before being educated to apply what they have learned in order to become exceptional performers with a variety of employment prospects (see Fig. 1). In other words, students must receive the necessary instructions to put what they have learned into practice in order to become outstanding performers with a variety of job options. Ideally, based on this framework, Soft skills have to be taught to students and they should be given the opportunities to apply these skills before they leave for the working world. This study seeks to investigate whether students are taught Soft skills and given the chance to apply these skills when they are at the university.

Soft skills are mostly related to the Affective domain of CT since these skills involve feelings, emotions, and attitudes. This domain encompasses how we interact with things emotionally, and it is further subdivided into five (5) subdomains: receiving, responding, valuing, organization, and characterization (Krathwohl et al., 1964). Although most people consider learning to be an intellectual or mental function (which means only the cognitive domain can be taught), attitudes and behaviors (affective) or Soft skills can also be taught. The Malaysian Government has identified seven (7) Soft skills that are vital to the employability of new graduates as shown in Figure 2. This study looks at CT as an umbrella which encompasses of all the learning domains in a human being. Ideally, if all three domains are given equal attention, then education in Malaysia will successfully produce balanced individuals which is the ultimate aim of the Malaysian National Education Philosophy (NEP).

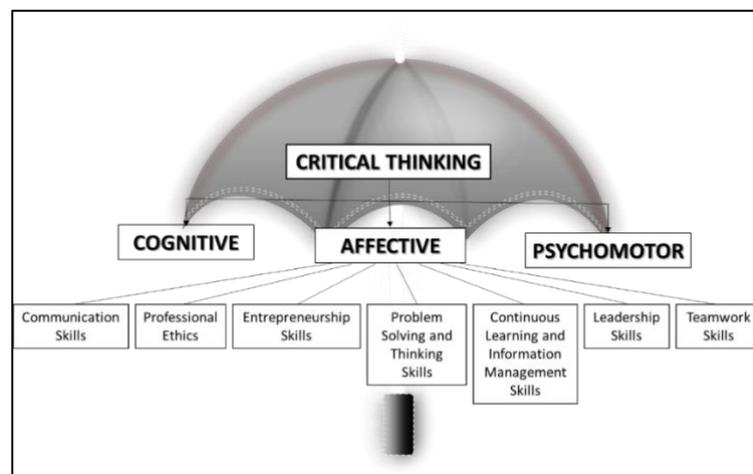


Figure 2. Theoretical Framework on Critical Thinking

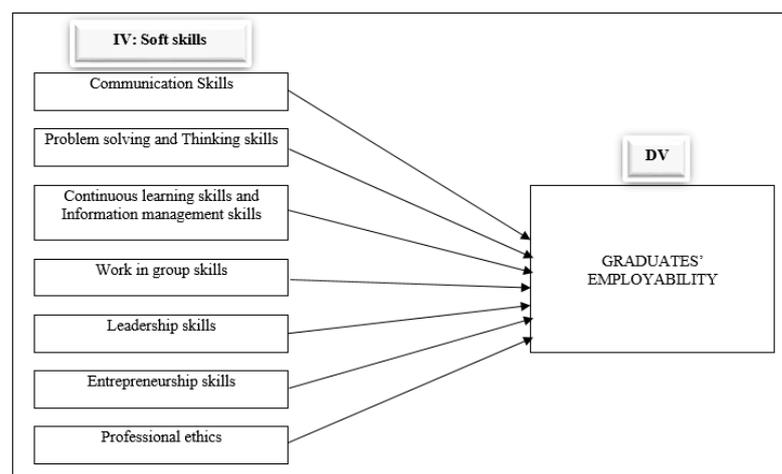


Figure 3. Conceptual framework: Graduates' employability is influenced by Soft skills

Affective Domain of Critical Thinking

By considering emotional elements, the affective domain influences an individual's capacity to make informed decisions. Our feelings play a significant part in determining the decisions we make. The affective domain is displayed using a comparable Bloom's Taxonomy, but it is discussed and explained in a different way. Bloom's Taxonomy uses five phases to represent the affective domain: receiving, responding, valuing, organizing, and characterizing.

There is widespread concern that current undergraduate programmes are not generating graduates with the requisite life-long learning capabilities for their careers (De La Harpe et al., 2000; Karakolis et al., 2022; Mseleku, 2022) although higher education has the capability and obligation to catalyze and nurture both life-long-learning of workers at all career stages and a learning-centered workplace environment (Baker, 1995). Traditional evaluation approaches focus on knowledge acquisition rather than proficiency in employment qualities (Ferns & Zegwaard, 2014). The relevance of the affective domain is validated by Archer and Davison (2008), who suggested that most employers value Social skills and personality type over a degree (Archer & Davison, 2008; Pholphirul, 2017).

To a considerable extent, the economic pressure to prepare graduates with cognitive-oriented graduate traits has resulted in the marginalization of affective abilities. Employers value these social and emotional abilities the most, although they differ from the talents students typically possess upon graduation (Krahn et al., 2002). Graduates' ability to "self-regulate learning and process new knowledge" when employed is limited by higher-order thinking facilitated solely within the cognitive domain (Michalsky, 2012), which suggested that the affective domain of CT has been overlooked.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The mixed-method analysis was employed to acquire data for this study. The method used in this study was in the form of an online survey or Microsoft forms, distributed to the targeted respondents by using an approach of convenient sampling. The questionnaire has both closed and open-ended questions where the subjective questions were analyzed qualitatively through manual content analysis specifically to determine if respondents know the meaning of each Soft skill and can relate its application in their classrooms.

Population and Sampling

Based on the research objectives, the population of this research includes all lecturers from the Language Centre of the National Defence University of Malaysia (NDUM). The sampling of this study is 17 lecturers at the Language Centre. Questionnaires were distributed through a convenient sampling

technique. The analysis utilized all the information from the respondents as an example estimate to get a progressively correct outcome.

Data Collection

Data and information of this research were gathered by means of questionnaire surveys that were distributed to respondents. The questionnaire has been modified after it was verified by three experts to accommodate the research objectives. The questionnaire of this study was mainly focused on closed-ended questions which allow the respondents to choose from concrete options available.

Data Analysis

The descriptive statistical analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25.0 on the data obtained from this research. Content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data from the open-ended questions.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis is used in a lot of simple action research, and it provides useful information about the nature of a certain group of people. Descriptive data analysis restricts generalization to a certain group of people evaluated. There are no findings that extend beyond this group, and there is no way to know if they are similar individuals outside the group. The information pertains to only one group.

The variables used a five-point Likert scale as it is numerical and measurable. There are five levels of the mean score used to measure the mean obtained from the analysis. The levels of the mean score are depicted below (Moidunny, 2009):

Table 1: Mean Score and Level

MEAN SCORE	LEVEL (frequency/agreement)
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low (never/strongly disagree)
1.81 – 2.60	Low (rarely/disagree)
2.61 – 3.20	Medium (sometimes/neutral)
3.21 – 4.20	High (often/agree)
4.21 – 5.00	Very High (always/strongly agree)

Reliability Analysis

As a quantitative approach to determine the relationship between the variables, a five-point Likert scale was used in this study to evaluate the relationship between the variables. The association between the variables in this study is measured using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is a method used to examine the instrument's dependability, which refers to the consistency

or stability of a measure of behavior (Cozby & Bates, 2015). The following table shows the rule of thumb of the Alpha coefficient range of Cronbach:

Table 2: The range of Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient

Cronbach’s Alpha	Internal Consistency
$\alpha \geq 0.90$	Excellent
$0.90 > \alpha \geq 0.80$	Good
$0.80 > \alpha \geq 0.70$	Acceptable
$0.70 > \alpha \geq 0.60$	Questionable
$0.60 > \alpha \geq 0.50$	Poor
$0.50 > \alpha$	Unacceptable

Inferential Analysis

The inferential analysis is a type of analysis that follows the data definition to get definitive results. The hypotheses were evaluated using inferential statistical methods, and the results were utilized to determine whether the hypotheses are accepted or rejected. Based on these findings, a study group’s generalization can be applied to the entire population, and this process is known as making conclusions based on inferential analysis. In order to explain how well the independent variables and dependent variable of the sample interact with each other, Pearson Product Moment correlation, *r*, is used to evaluate the proposed hypotheses, and also to assess the intensity of the correlation between the two variables. The rule of thumb for Pearson correlation analysis (Hair et al., 2010) is shown in the table below:

Table 3: Description of Pearson Correlation coefficient

Coefficient Range	Strength of Correlation
± 0.00 to ± 0.20	Slight
± 0.21 to ± 0.40	Low
± 0.41 to ± 0.60	Moderate
± 0.61 to ± 0.80	High
± 0.81 to ± 1.00	Perfect

Content Analysis

The open-ended questions that were posed to the respondents from the questionnaire were analyzed using content analysis in this study. The content analysis focuses on identifying, evaluating, and recording patterns or themes within data, with the themes serving as analysis categories for the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The questions ask respondents to define the meaning of Soft skills and relate to their classroom application. A statement on each skill is followed or supported by two (2) examples of respondents’ answers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic data

The demographic survey contains four (4) questions on the characteristics of the respondents which include gender, profession, qualification, and working experience. Question 1 asked for the respondents' gender which respectively consists of 58.8 percent (n=10) female and 41.2 percent (n=7) male. Question 2 described the profession of the respondents. The respondents who had answered the questionnaire are 100 percent (n=17) lecturers. Question 3 is related to their academic qualifications. The results showed that 64.7 percent (n = 11) of the respondents are Master's holders and 35.3 percent (n=6) are PhD holders. Question 4 is about the amount of time (years) of employment of the respondents since graduation. 17.6 percent (n=3) have less than five years of work experience, 35.3 percent (n=6) have six to 10 years of experience, 11.8 percent (n =2) have 11 years to 15 years of experience, another 11.8 percent (n =2) have 16 years to 20 years of experience, and 23.5 percent (n=4) have more than 21 years of working experience.

Descriptive analysis was also used to answer the research questions. The result for questions 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, and 21 (close-ended questions) where mean score is concerned; is presented in the table 4 below. The most important Soft skill to the least important Soft skill for employment according to the respondents: The highest mean score is CS3 and CS4, which is 4.53. CS3 says Communication skills are needed for employment. CS4 says Communication skills are important at your workplace. Second highest is PSTS3, PSTS4, PE3, and PE4, which is 4.47. PSTS3 says Problem solving and thinking skills are needed for employment and PSTS4 says Problem solving and thinking skills are important at your workplace. PE3 says Professional ethics are needed for employment. PE4 says Professional Ethics are important at your place. On the other hand, lowest mean score is TS1 and ES1 which is 3.18. TS1 says graduates or new employees have poor Teamwork skills. ES1 says graduates or new employees have poor Entrepreneurship skills.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
CS3 (1)	4.53	.514	17
CS4 (1)	4.53	.514	17
PSTS3 (2)	4.47	.514	17
PSTS4 (2)	4.47	.514	17
TS1 (1)	3.18	.636	17
ES1 (2)	3.18	.809	17
PE1 (3)	3.29	.920	17
PE3 (2)	4.47	.514	17
PE4 (2)	4.47	.514	17

Legend	
CS:	Communication Skills
PSTS:	Problem Solving and Thinking Skills
CLSIMS:	Continuous Learning and Information Management Skills
TS:	Teamwork Skills
LS:	Leadership Skills
ES:	Entrepreneurship Skills
PE:	Professional Ethics
	Highest
	Lowest

It is known that Communication skills are important as we need to interact to get things done. Previous studies have shown that employers preferred new employees who can communicate well. The capacity to listen, talk, follow directions, interact with people, and participate in meetings are all examples of oral communication abilities (Ulinski & O'callaghan, 2002). The majority of university education programmes place an emphasis on analytical and mathematical talents while ignoring the development of other crucial skills needed to perform in an organization. More attention should be paid to teaching Soft skills such as the capacity to interact with individuals within a company.

What are the Soft Skills needed by new employees?

Question (ii), (iii), and (iv)

Table 5. Mean Scores for Question (ii), (iii), and (iv)

Question	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ii	17	3.29	5.00	4.1849	.46775
iii	17	3.43	5.00	4.3277	.49426
iv	17	3.71	5.00	4.3277	.43672
Valid N (listwise)	17				

Based on Table 5, questions (ii), (iii), and (iv) from each section refer to the Soft skills required by new employees according to the respondents. The questions explained the need of skills in educational organisation; which explains whether employers seek these Soft skills, whether these skills are needed for employment, and whether they are important in their workplace. The lowest mean score obtained from the table is 4.1849 (the need of the skills in educational organisation). Referring to Table 1, all mean scores are above 3.21, this indicates High level of agreement from the respondents; that is, the respondents agreed that all these Soft skills are needed by new employees in educational organisation or any other employment sector, employers seek these Soft skills, and they are important in the workplace. There is no doubt that these skills are important and that is why tertiary level educational institutions are instructed to integrate the seven (7) soft skills into all existing courses at the universities. It is however, unclear whether the directive is being followed.

Table 6. Mean Scores for Soft Skills

Soft skills	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication Skills (2)	17	3.33	4.67	4.0784	.38242
Problem Solving and Thinking Skills (1)	17	3.50	5.00	4.1176	.42803
Continuous Learning Skills and Information Management Skills (6)	17	3.33	5.00	3.9804	.42444
Teamwork Skills (3)	17	3.50	5.00	4.0686	.43724
Leadership Skills (4)	17	3.33	4.83	4.0294	.40498
Entrepreneurship Skills (7)	17	2.50	4.83	3.6765	.63866
Professional Ethics (5)	17	3.50	5.00	4.0294	.40925

The highest mean means perceived most important for employment by respondents and the lowest mean means perceived least important for employment by respondents.

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics (mean scores) for all the Soft skills mentioned in this research. Problem Solving and Thinking Skills have the highest mean of 4.1176 which indicates the most important Soft skill for employment by respondents while Entrepreneurship Skills scored the lowest mean of 3.6765 which indicates as the least important Soft skills for employment by respondents. However, a mean score of 3.6765 is considered as High in the Mean Score table (Table 1) indicating that respondents agree that Entrepreneurship Skills are also important for employment but the least important among the seven (7) listed Soft skills by the Malaysian government.

In Malaysia, problem solving and thinking skills (critical thinking) have been introduced and integrated into the school curriculum in the early 1990s. According to the literature review, graduates must possess a variety of employability skills before they can begin working. These include teamwork, communication, and problem-solving and decision-making skills, which are the employability skills with the highest level of importance. Employees with problem solving and thinking skills are cognitively prepared to manage anything their professions throw at them. When issues unavoidably develop, problem solvers are able to observe, assess the situation, and take quick action.

On the other hand, although Entrepreneurship Skills is ranked as the least important, employers still want graduates with this skill. Singh and Kumar (2022) stated that employees with entrepreneurial abilities are those that enable people to recognise and investigate new business prospects as well as provide novel goods and services to the market. An effective businessperson possesses enough skills to manage a variety of tasks.

Do new employees (future graduates) have poor soft skills that are needed for employment?

Question (i)

Question (i) from each section investigates whether the respondents think new employees have poor Soft skills. In this question, if the respondents disagree to the statement, it shows that the lecturers think that their students or future graduates have these Soft skills (which is the opposite of what employers think).

Table 7. Mean Scores for Question (i)

Question	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I	17	2.00	4.71	3.3277	.65614
Valid N (listwise)	17				

Table 7 shows the mean score for this question is 3.3277, which is High. This demonstrates that respondents agree that new employees have low or poor Soft skills. This agrees with what is being said about the graduates; that they lack of Soft skills that are needed for employment. This issue has been harped in Malaysian social media for a long time. Soft skills as listed by the Malaysian government are communication skills, problem solving and thinking skills, continuous learning skills and information management skills, work in group skills, leadership skills, entrepreneurship skills, and professional ethics; play a huge role in determining one's career.

Are Soft skills being taught at the university?

Question (v) and (vi)

Table 8. Mean Scores for Question (v) and (vi)

Question	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
V	17	2.86	5.00	3.9076	.64274
Vi	17	3.00	5.00	3.9076	.48954
Valid N (listwise)	17				

In each section, questions (v) and (vi) were asked to determine whether Soft skills are taught at the university. Question (v) is to check whether respondents think Soft skills are being taught at the university whilst Question (vi) is to see whether they agree that graduates will be exposed to these Soft skills through job training (internship). Table 8 shows that the mean scores for both questions is 3.9076, which is High. These indicates that respondents agree that these Soft skills are being taught at the university and they also agree that internship (training on the job) will expose the students to these soft skills. As we know, employers are complaining that graduates do not have Soft skills. We are aware that tertiary level educational institutions are instructed to teach the seven (7) soft skills. If the students have been taught the skills, why then are the employers saying otherwise?

Soft Skills Rank

In Section I of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rank the Soft skills suggested by the Malaysian government according to their importance from their perspectives. At the same time, all the Soft skills were analysed using SPSS v.25.0 to determine the most important to least important Soft skills based on the mean scores. The results are as in Table 9.

Table 9. Soft Skills Rank

No.	Section I	SPSS v.25.0
1.	Communication Skills	Problem Solving and Thinking Skills
2.	Problem Solving and Thinking Skills	Communication Skills
3.	Teamwork Skills	Teamwork Skills
4.	Leadership Skills	Leadership Skills
5.	Professional Ethics	Professional Ethics
6.	Continuous Learning Skills and Information Management Skills	Continuous Learning Skills and Information Management Skills
7.	Entrepreneurship Skills	Entrepreneurship Skills

The table above shows that Problem Solving and Thinking Skills tops the list; next is Communication Skills, followed by Teamwork Skills; where both are highly rated as the most important Soft skills for employment by respondents. Leadership skills, and Professional Ethics are also ranked in the top five (5) important Soft skills for employment. Whereas, Entrepreneurship Skills is ranked as the least important skill for employment.

Reliability Analysis

All the variables used in the questionnaire are reliable because the coefficient alpha is greater than 0.70, which is the sound level of internal reliability. The α for “Soft skills for the questionnaire is 0.952. All the variables met the acceptable standard of reliability analysis and can be confirmed as reliable, standard, and relevant.

Inferential Analysis

Pearson’s correlation coefficient was used in this research to measure the strength of the correlation between the Soft skills that are listed in this research.

Table 10. Correlations

Soft skills	CS	PSTS	CLSIMS	TS	LS	ES	PE
CS	Pearson Correlation	1	.757**	.641**	.612**	.672**	.617**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.006	.009	.003	.005
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17
PSTS	Pearson Correlation	.757**	1	.711**	.740**	.743**	.472
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.001	.001	.001	.056
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17
CLSIMS	Pearson Correlation	.641**	.711**	1	.842**	.878**	.782**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.001		.000	.000	.000
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17
TS	Pearson Correlation	.612**	.740**	.842**	1	.939**	.616**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.001	.000		.000	.008
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17
LS	Pearson Correlation	.672**	.743**	.878**	.939**	1	.688**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.001	.000	.000		.002
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17
ES	Pearson Correlation	.644**	.472	.782**	.616**	.688**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.056	.000	.008	.002	
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17
PE	Pearson Correlation	.617**	.792**	.963**	.874**	.919**	.729**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 10 indicates all the skills have high positive *r* value indicating that all Soft skills are correlated to each other. This concludes that putting focus on any one of these skills will enhance the other Soft skills on the list.

Content Analysis

In Section 1 of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to state the Soft skills that are needed most in their profession and the three (3) highest rated skills are: Problem Solving and Thinking Skills, Communication Skills, and Teamwork Skills. The respondents were then asked to define the meaning and relate the application of these Soft skills in their classrooms. Statement on each skills is substantiated by two (2) examples of respondents’ answers.

Problem-Solving and Thinking Skills, Communication Skills, and Teamwork Skills

Problem-Solving and Thinking Skills

In this section, respondents shared their views on the meaning of Problem Solving and Thinking Skills, which are regarded as the most significant Soft skills for employability in the ranking. Active listening, analysis, research, inventiveness, dependability, and decision-making are all indicators of problem-solving and thinking skills. In addition, the respondents shared their definition of this skill as:

Respondent A: The ability to find solutions despite unforeseen circumstances and lack of resources. Knowing one's limit and achieving or utilising the best within that limit is also a part of the skills.

Respondent B: The ability to come up with ethical multiple solutions to a given problem when conventional solutions are unavailable.

To summarise, Problem Solving and Thinking Skills are the ability or ways of thinking that allow a person to deal with unexpected situations. The respondents gave positive insights on this Soft skill, and this proves that they too, support the importance of this skill for graduates' employability. The respondents know the meaning of this particular skill and can define it appropriately.

Communication skills

The question for this section is to define communication skills in respondents' own words. To apply communication skills, one must first have the knowledge of what communication skill is and how it contributes to the Soft skills for employability. When asked about communication skills, most would respond with "the ability to communicate". It is true in a sense that communication can only happen when two or more people communicate with each other. The respondents also shared that:

Respondent C: A communication skill is an ability to communicate with others regardless of language, racial, culture, religion, and other barriers. It involves the ability to deliver and convey messages and engage in active conversations with people. It is crucial because the need to have interaction and communication with your colleagues and other departments cannot be disputed at all. It is important for you to acquire communication and interpersonal skills for your career advancement.

Respondent D: Communication Skills are the capabilities people employ to provide and receive various types of information. It is the idea of being able to share fresh ideas, sentiments, or even an update on the current project we are working on at work effectively. It also involves listening, speaking, observing, and empathising. It is understanding the variations in how to communicate through face-to-face contacts, phone conversations, and digital communications such as email and social media.

The Malaysian government recommends seven (7) soft talents, one of which is Communication Skills. It is important because we frequently communicate with others to establish plans, form relationships, and complete daily activities, these skills are essential to our daily lives as they can make all the difference in both business and personal life. The different views from each respondent had given a positive outcome as they were able to explain Communication Skills in their own terms. As it was the most picked Soft skills, this confirms the importance of Communication Skills for graduates' employability.

Teamwork skills

Teamwork Skills are frequently used, especially when work must be done in groups. It promotes active listening, honesty, awareness, and responsibility. Upon the analysis of the answer from Section I, on the most important Soft Skills for employability, Teamwork Skills ranked third place. The following are the respondents' thoughts on this skill are:

Respondent E: Working well with a group of individuals to reach a common purpose or end. Attending to the needs of other team members. Considering everyone's thoughts, not just your own.

Respondent F: The ability to make things work and achieve goals despite working with people of different ages, backgrounds, abilities and needs.

The Malaysian government had listed Teamwork Skills as one of the Soft Skills needed for employment. The need for this skill is essential as most industries operate in groups. When employees collaborate to achieve a common goal, they use a combination of talents, attributes, methods, and processes. This is why Teamwork Skills or collaboration is so important. The responses from the respondents also support the means of this skill.

Situations where Soft skills (Problem Solving and Thinking Skills, Communication Skills, and Teamwork Skills) are used at the workplace

Problem-solving and Thinking skills

Being a lecturer is not only about teaching students, but it includes handling situations related to the students. As online-based learning is being practiced during the Covid-19 pandemic, lecturers had to familiarize themselves with the use of online platforms and take prompt action when there is a problem to ensure their classes go on smoothly. Lecturers from the Language Centre claimed to use Problem-solving and Thinking skills in these situations: (active listening, analysis, research, creativity, dependability, and decision-making)

Respondent G: Sudden change of plans which requires quick decision-making and amendments. I always stress on listening properly to lecturer's explanation and to analyse any problem carefully before making any decisions.

Respondent H: Having two important tasks which need to be attended at the same time, you have to compare and evaluate which one needs to be solved first, and think of how to solve them.

Issues and problems are inevitable, and it is part of life. However, every problem has a solution. Problem Solving and Thinking Skills can be useful in situations that require critical thinking, such as when dealing with difficult situations. Problem solving skills are used regularly while conducting classroom activities.

Communication Skills

Communication happens on a daily basis whether in a form of verbal or non-verbal communication. Since the respondents for this research are all lecturers, the situation where they are required to use communication skills are often in class or meeting. This is corroborated by the responses provided by respondents:

Respondent I: When I am teaching online and need to deliver an effective lecture to help students understand the lessons as best as possible. Having good communication skills will help in students' engagement. Engagement in communication happens when there is meaningful communication.

Respondent J: To disagree towards certain issues or ideas and to add-up something to your colleague's idea in any meeting without offending the related parties. Communication skills are needed in negotiations that is in agreeing or coming to a decision agreed upon by everyone in a group.

Since the respondents are lecturers from the Language Centre, they emphasized the importance of Soft Skills, especially Communication Skills in classrooms, offices, or workplaces. Lecturers communicate with students daily and good communication skills are required by both parties; lecturers need good Communication Skills to be able to teach the students whilst students need good Communication Skills to communicate with the lecturers, and in doing their assignments, especially in group work to avoid miscommunication.

Teamwork Skills

Teamwork Skills are one of the Soft Skills that are frequently employed in the workplace. As teamwork involves two or more people working together to work on a task, communicating and sharing ideas, it is vital that this skill is set as one of the Soft Skills for employability. The following are examples of how these skills are used at the Language Centre:

Respondent K: We employ teamwork skills on a regular basis, particularly in our research and publications. We divide our tasks, discuss, and communicate well in order to reach our common goals, which contributes to our individual performance scores, PB productivity, and university's recognition nationwide.

Respondent L: Working on a novel project that involves the efforts from people with different exposure to the concept. We also give group assignments to students to enhance their teamwork skill because they definitely need this skill when to go out in the job market.

The responses reveal that respondents, who work as lecturers at the Language Centre, use Teamwork Skills on a daily basis, thus, confirming that Teamwork Skills are one of the most vital Soft skills among the seven (7) Soft skills recommended by the Malaysian government.

CONCLUSION

Critical thinking has been looked upon as an important criterion that every individual should have within themselves so that they can move around independently and make their own timely and sound decisions. Employers make it essential for their employees to have higher critical thinking skills so that they can critically analyze a problem and proceed further in evaluating the problem and coming up with solutions. Employers in the working world opined that graduates or new employees do not have the required Soft skills (the affective domain of CT) and this is supported by the respondents (the lecturers) even though they claimed that those Soft skills are taught at the university. Not only that but these Soft Skills are direly needed for employment. Communication Skills, Problem-Solving and Thinking Skills, and Teamwork Skills are the most needed Soft skills in an educational organization or any other organization; which makes it crucial for new employees or graduates to acquire these skills. This research suggests that higher educational institutions place a greater emphasis on developing these Soft skills for graduates' employability by making sure that the meaning of Soft skills is understood by lecturers and how these skills can be taught through teaching and learning processes at the university. This study also suggests considering creating a course specifically in teaching Soft skills to meet employers' needs, apart from teaching them integrated in existing courses. Universities' instruction must incorporate and stress non-cognitive skills in order to fully and comprehensively prepare future workers with the information and abilities they need to succeed in the demands of the workplace.

Author contributions

N.B.Z.S developed the idea and collected the data, N.S.B.A.A worked on literature and revisions and B.M.B revised the manuscript and worked on methods.

Data (and Software) Availability

All data underlying the results are available as part of the article and no additional sources of data are required.

Competing interests

No competing interests are declared by the author.

Ethical statement

The researcher sought the approval of the language center of the National Defense University of Malaysia before they were approached for the data collection from the research participants. All the participants were asked for informed consent to publish their responses without their names and personal information.

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