

The importance of including soft skills in higher education

La importancia de incluir las habilidades blandas en la educación superior

MARTÍNEZ, Bahena Elizabeth†* & ESCAMILLA, Regis Daisy

TecNM, Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Cuautitlán Izcalli.

ID 1st Autor: *Bahena Elizabeth, Martínez* / ORC ID: 0000-0003-4021-4866

ID 1st Co-author: *Regis Daisy, Escamilla*

DOI: 10.35429/JUM.2023.18.7.25.30

Received July 30, 2023; Accepted December 30, 2023

Abstract

Professionalism today has taken on great relevance in the student aspect, the ability of Higher Education Institutions to improve their study plans is undeniable, adapting them to the needs requested by companies and organizations, this is because the increase in competitiveness and continuous improvement in work processes is seen, however, employers are also requesting that the graduate know how to handle situations that go beyond technical or methodological knowledge, situations where good communication, integration are reflected. , interpersonal development, etc. Objective. The main reason sought when carrying out this work is to highlight that the students should increase both the hard skills and the soft skills, improving their reasoning capacity and their analytical capacity and putting them into practice. manifest in any area of your life in which you are, to this end, we show what the so-called "Soft Skills" consist of, their impact on higher education and the way in which the processes that are implemented will be favorably affected. study plans and programs to improve the teaching-learning process. Methodology. A representative sample of applied research is included that allows us to observe the increase in security, integration into work groups on students who included soft skills in their subjects and those who were not trained in this area. Contribution. This research seeks to highlight the need to adapt study plans to include processes that help young people increase their cognitive and interpersonal abilities for the benefit of their professional knowledge, which will allow them to handle themselves more fluidly in any environment in which you operate and will increase your security and appreciation in the activity you carry out.

Resumen

El profesionalismo en la actualidad, ha tomado una gran relevancia en el aspecto estudiantil, es innegable la capacidad de las Instituciones de Educación Superior por mejorar sus planes de estudio, adecuándolos a las necesidades que se solicitan en las empresas y organizaciones, esto obedece a que se ve el incremento en competitividad y mejora continua en los procesos laborales, sin embargo, los empleadores, también están solicitando que el egresado sepa manejar situaciones que van más allá del conocimiento técnico o metodológico, situaciones donde se vean reflejadas la buena comunicación, la integración, el desarrollo interpersonal, etc. Objetivo. La principal razón que se busca al realizar este trabajo, es el poner de manifiesto que se debe buscar que el alumnado incremente tanto la parte de habilidades duras como la parte de habilidades blandas, mejorando su capacidad de raciocinio y su capacidad analítica y las ponga de manifiesto en cualquier ámbito de su vida en el que se encuentre, para ello, se muestran en qué consisten las llamadas "Soft Skills", su impacto en la educación superior y la forma en la que se verán favorablemente afectados los procesos que se implementen en los planes y programas de estudios para mejora del proceso enseñanza-aprendizaje. Metodología. Se incluye una muestra representativa sobre una investigación aplicada que permite observar el incremento en la seguridad, integración a grupos de trabajo sobre alumnos que llevaron incluidas habilidades blandas en sus materias y los que no fueron capacitados en esta área. Contribución. Esta investigación, busca poner de manifiesto la necesidad de adecuar los planes de estudio para que se incluyan procesos que ayuden a los jóvenes a incrementar sus capacidades cognitivas e interpersonales en beneficio de sus saberes profesionales, lo que le permitiera manejarse de una manera más fluida en cualquier ambiente en el que se desenvuelva e incrementará su seguridad y apreciación en la actividad que realice.

Skill, Graduate, Educational process

Habilidad, egresado, proceso educativo

Citation: MARTÍNEZ, Bahena Elizabeth & ESCAMILLA, Regis Daisy. The importance of including soft skills in higher education. *Journal University Management*. 2023. 7-18:25-30.

* Author's Correspondence (azuri9404@gmail.com)

† Researcher contributing as first author.

Introduction

The complexity of today's working life has meant that jobs in organisations are becoming increasingly specialised and the fact of climbing up the organisational chart on an individual basis has been revalued; this may be satisfactory for only part of the working population, however, we must take into account the fact that, without having an adequate working team, success can hardly be attributed to a single person, just as it is not possible for a single individual to do all the work to achieve the proposed goals and objectives.

This is where we realise that soft skills and their inclusion in companies allow the development of an effective socio-emotional relationship, assuming that working relationships in the medium and long term will be positively influenced in all areas of people's lives.

This paper aims to demonstrate how effective it is to implement soft skills within the curricula of higher education institutions, which will allow students to already handle this type of instruction before entering organisational life, allowing them to be implemented in a favourable way and taking advantage of the fact of generating success and performance in the productivity of work teams.

What are Soft Skills?

The also called "soft skills" are a way to implement behaviours and skills that are in accordance with the SHOULD BE, that is, to allow students to develop behaviours that help them to obtain their maximum capabilities and those of the people around them, thinking about a personal welfare first but also that is common to all, the main soft skills that we seek to work among students are:

- a) **LEADERSHIP.** It allows a good guide in a work team, facilitating communication and cooperation between the members of the team.



Figure 1 Liderazgo

Source: (Pinterest, 2023)

- b) **EMPATHY.** To be able to accept and understand that there are failures because we work with a team of people who are fallible, to give the opportunity to improve and to keep the positive experiences in favour of continuous improvement.

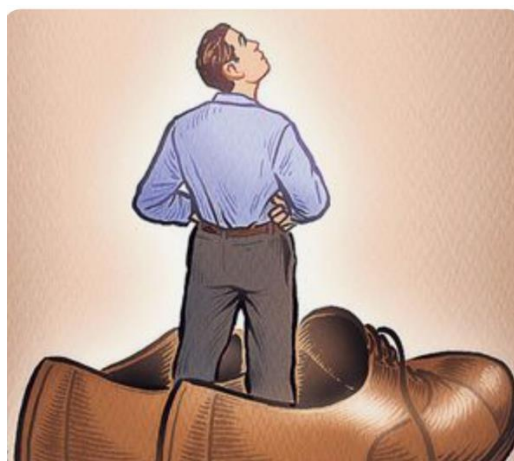


Figure 2 Empatía

Source: (Pinterest, 2023)

- c) **TEAMWORK.** Good adaptation and participation among people results in excellence in the activities carried out for the good of the organisation.



Figure 3 Trabajo en equipo
Source: (Pinterest, 2023)

- d) d) **RESILIENCIA**. Perceiving failures as new opportunities and emerging stronger from them.



Figure 4 RESILIENCIA
Source: (Pinterest, 2023)

These are some of the soft skills that are considered to have the greatest impact on recent graduates as part of their integration into the labour market, which will allow them to make great contributions in their work activity, as it allows them to know the function of the person in charge of the area or project, to cooperate with their work group and to be able to cope with the vicissitudes that arise in their day-to-day work and that will help them to be more assertive and relate better to their environment.

Why is it important to implement the development of Soft Skills in the school environment at higher education level?

Much is said about the way in which knowledge is adapted to the needs of the organisational environment, however, the importance of being able to develop and manage the behaviour of the members of the organisation has been overlooked; sometimes, the graduates of the educational systems have an excellent preparation, according to their area of expertise, what are called "Hard Skills", which, in the past, was enough to be classified as an optimal candidate for a position, but, with the passage of time, it has been shown that other types of skills are also required which, worked together, can be the basis for an integral development of the individual.

It is of great impact that students interact with the people around them and develop in a safe, reliable environment, improving the quality of education while building knowledge that together will build the longed-for EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE, making young people complete professionals.

We are navigating in an era of a highly competitive market, so it is important to ask ourselves: What can differentiate me from the rest, so we must take into account some aspects such as:

- Knowledge helps you get a job, but the soft skills you possess can contribute to the success or failure of your career.
- Soft skills are acquired for life, so it is important to acquire them in the stages of our development.
- Graduates who possess soft skills will have the tools that are appropriate to their comprehensive training when they go out into the labour market.
- Today, we are not only looking for employees, but also for coaches and leaders in their area to lead their areas and departments to excellence.

3. How does implementing Soft Skills improve educational and work environments?

Nowadays, schools must develop competencies that allow them to favour the link between knowledge and feelings and emotions; these are essential for the evolutionary, social and affective progress of the student.

Putting "emotional intelligence" into practice allows for the psychological and social well-being of people, helping them to grow, facilitating decision-making and effective and creative communication that begins in the classroom and permeates into the social and working environment of the students.

Classroom processes must propose a series of actions that allow for the exchange of information, based largely on interpersonal relationships and constant and effective cooperation. In order to achieve these skills, strategies based on cooperation, interaction, communication, socialisation, experimental research, case studies, etc., must be implemented to support the consolidation of learning and to demonstrate what has been acquired as this type of reinforcement is carried out.

The scope that soft skills have within educational institutions creates an idea of having real and achievable aspirations, with high personal development purposes, doing this in a systematic, consolidated and really planned way within the didactic planning, giving them an appropriately organised approach according to their academic profile.

4. Methodology to be developed by implementing Soft Skills.

Soft skills as mentioned throughout this research can have a great impact on the professional productivity of students, as they integrate cognitive skills that can guide them to the capabilities and talents of people with more productive work environments, increasing active collaboration, innovative mentality and decrease of conflicts that will make them excel.

In order to demonstrate the above mentioned, an experimental and quantitative research was carried out, which focuses on a Higher Education Institution (HEI), where two groups will be taken as a sample, these groups are of eighth semester who are studying engineering area career, where group 1 takes a subject of soft skills in their last semester and group 2 will not include it in the list of subjects of last semester, this in order to see the impact that could have one with the other; It is worth mentioning that these groups that were evaluated once they finished the eighth semester joined a company as part of their professional practice in the ninth semester, which is the most appropriate reason for this study.

The following explains the process that was carried out to identify if there is an importance of implementing soft skills as a subject in the training process during the engineering degree they are studying and if this would benefit the integration in work teams.

At the end of the semester, each group was asked to make a presentation of the project they carried out in the subject of e-Business, the objective of which is to make an electronic sales proposal elaborated on a platform, in which they must include diverse knowledge among which are the technical part, teamwork, marketing for the sales competition of their proposed product, among others.

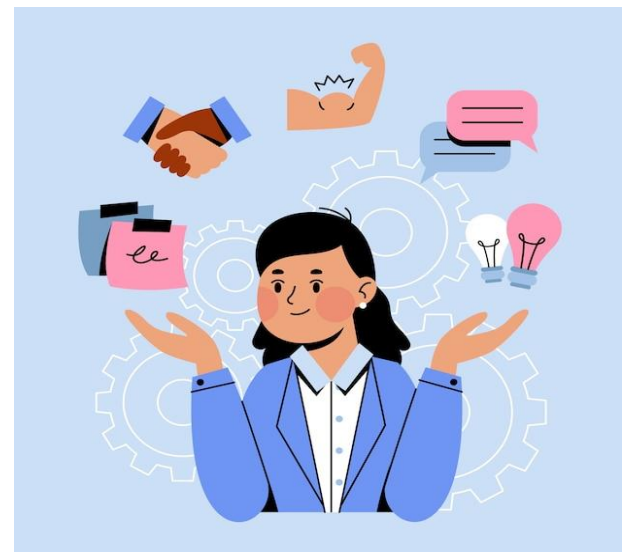
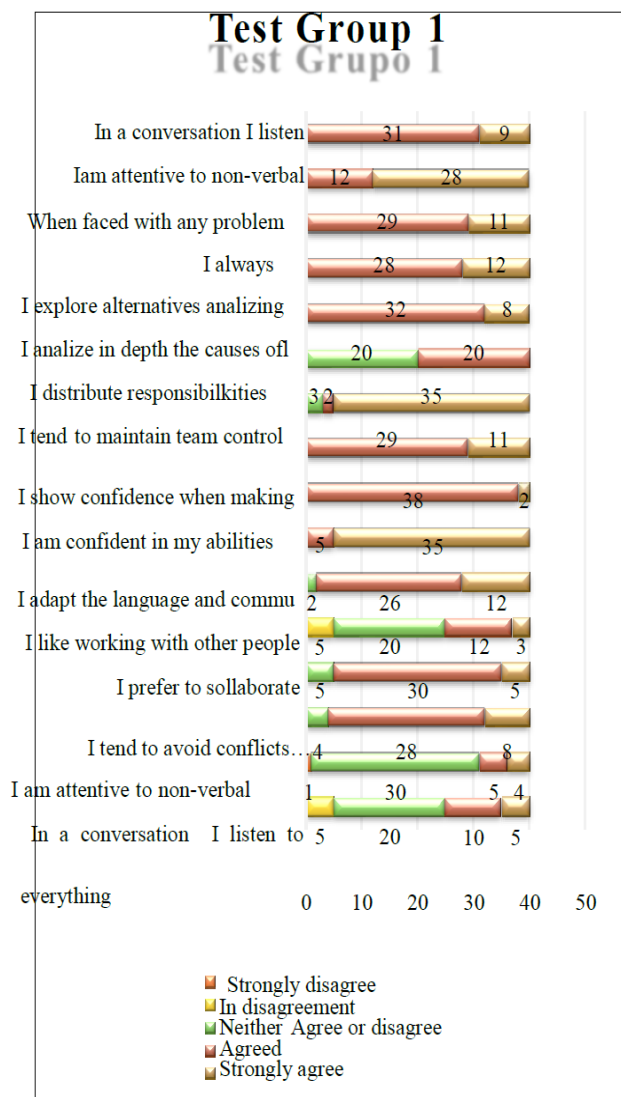


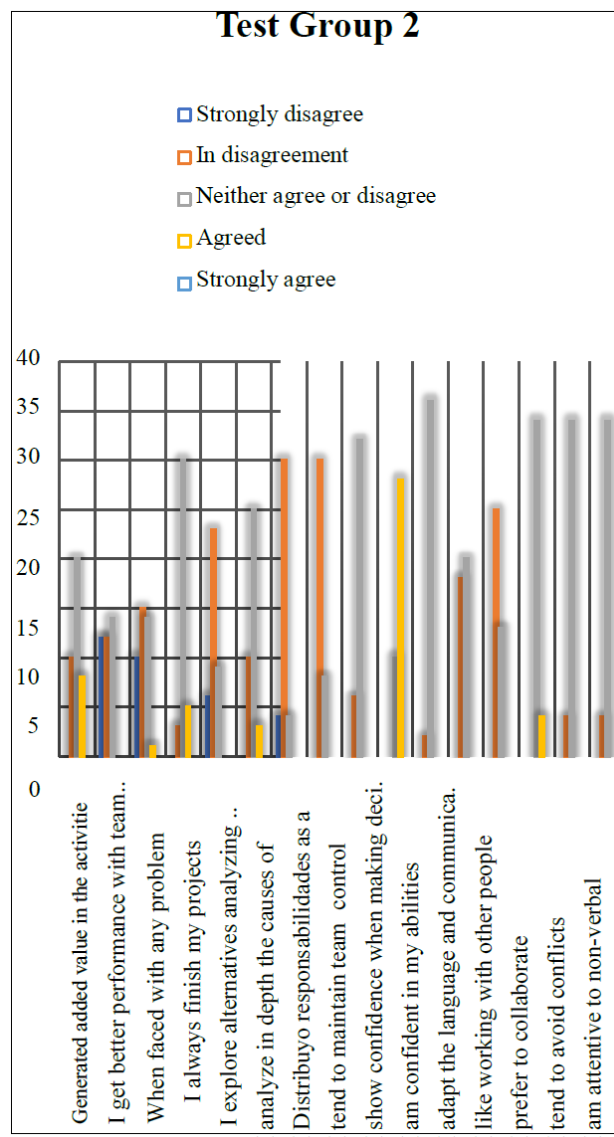
Figure 5 Soft Skills
Source: (Pinterest, 2023)

Subsequently, a test was applied to group 1, so that the students could self-evaluate themselves and this, in the research, would serve to identify the impact that the soft skills subject had had during the development of the project and its final delivery, with the results of this sample as shown in Graph 1; The sample was applied to a total of 40 students in group 1, who were given a test comprising 16 questions oriented towards conflict resolution, leadership, innovation, teamwork, communication and innovation, some of which are personal soft skills to be developed in their project.



Graphic 1 Test applied to group 1 (Soft Skills)
Source: Own elaboration

As can be seen in Graph 1, it shows at a glance that they are oriented to teamwork and have a greater willingness to have a more fluid communication and interest in leadership, now it is the turn of the application of the same test to Group 2, which has a sample of 38 students, having the same objective within this work only with the difference that this group did not take the subject of soft skills; In the following Graph 2, shows the results obtained by applying the test.



Graphic 2 Test applied to group 2
Source: Own elaboration

Results

In Graph 2, a great change can be observed, it can be mentioned that they show apathy since it is evident that they do not like teamwork, no leadership in the majority and without adequate communication.

As a comparison of both graphs, it can be observed that there is a great discrepancy between group 1 that took the soft skills course, which demonstrates excellent teamwork, innovation and communication, compared to group 2, which demonstrates disinterest in teamwork, innovation and communication. group 2, which shows disinterest and little fluency in communication, as well as expression.

With the above reviewed, it is recommended to include the subject of soft skills to the study plan of the engineering careers, so that students increase their cognitive and interpersonal skills and develop with greater confidence.

5. Actual impact on students who apply Soft Skills vs. those who do not include them

Soft skills are of great importance in the development of a student going into the professional area, as it is there, where several skills are applied and can be developed in projects such as leadership, innovation and teamwork being skills of importance already in the professional field; This is where we can see the real impact on the students who make up group 1, and those who apply soft skills, the great disadvantage of the students in group 2 being that the subject was not included and from which the skills that are of impact for companies are unprotected, as the integration of teamwork, communication and many other skills, which can also be included in the personal area, are of the utmost importance.

This is how this research suggests that it is necessary to work on the various soft skills during the training of students so that this will benefit school activities, personal and interrelationships, for better fluency in various areas of the student.



Figure 6 Students with Soft Skills

Source: (Pinterest, 2023)

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to the Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores de Cuautitlán Izcalli, for funding support for this article.

References

Education, P. H. (2023, 27 junio). *Habilidades blandas en educación superior es una estrategia competitiva.* Educación. <https://blog.maestriasydiplomados.tec.mx/habilidades-blandas-en-educacion-superior-es-estrategia-competitiva>

Angélica, L. F. M. (s. f.). *Habilidades blandas una clave para brindar educación de calidad: revisión teórica.* http://scielo.sld.cu/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1990-86442022000400412

López, I. (2022, 24 marzo). *El fomento de habilidades blandas en educación superior.* Noticias de Tijuana | EL IMPARCIAL. <https://www.elimparcial.com/tijuana/columnas/El-Fomento-de-Habilidades-Blandas-en-Educacion-Superior-20220324-0006.html>

Avila, D. (2020, 10 mayo). *Clase en línea y trabajo en equipo.* | Vector Premium. Pinterest. <https://www.pinterest.com.mx/pin/611856299365382818/>

Education, P. H. (2023, 27 junio). *Habilidades blandas en educación superior es una estrategia competitiva.* Educación. <https://blog.maestriasydiplomados.tec.mx/habilidades-blandas-en-educacion-superior-es-estrategia-competitiva>

.