Important Soft Skills to Promote Youth Employment in Algeria

Meriem Bouallaga [1], Nadia Grine [2]

1- Badji Mokhtar Annaba University, Faculty of Letters and Languages LIPED Laboratory, bouallaga.meriem23@gmail.com
2- Badji Mokhtar Annaba University, Faculty of Letters and Languages, LIPED Laboratory, nadiagrine7@yahoo.fr

Abstract

This Paper Suggests That Algerian Youth Need To Develop A Set Of Specific Skills In Order To Gain Access To Employment, Or Create Their Own Business. The Current Research Aims At Identifying Some Important Skills That Can Help Youth Overcome The Challenges They Face In The Algerian Employment Context; It Also Presents Some Career Projects' Initiatives In Algeria That Have Already Succeeded In Building Many Necessary Soft Skills. A Questionnaire Was Administered To 3rd Year License And Master II Language Sciences EFL Students At Badji Mokhtar Annaba University In Order To Investigate Their Self-Perceived Soft Skills Level. The Findings Revealed That EFL Students Have An Average To A Decent Level Of Soft Skills That Is Needed In The Workplace. Yet More Efforts Are Still Required To Improve Those Crucial Skills.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Youth Employment, Job Search, Skills Gap, Career Projects.

.

Corresponding Author, Meriem Bouallaga: bouallaga.meriem23@gmail.com

1. Introduction

In a context of globalization, it is necessary that Algerian youths adapt to job market requirements and needs. There is a skills mismatch and a training gap between graduates' skills and the job market needs (Cappelli, P.,2012). Furthermore, businesses can only be competitive if their human capital has a qualitative education (Kovačič, H.,2009).

Transnational cooperation between educational institutions and actors of the job market is essential (Technopolis Organisation,2011). Indeed, preparation for the job market and entrepreneurial education are not yet sufficiently integrated into our educational institutions namely universities (OECD & EC,2012), so there are skills mismatches, in particular those of soft skills and technical competences.

However, due to high unemployment and struggling economies across the country, many youth graduates find it hard to get a good job. Surprisingly, the biggest challenge is not always a lack of jobs. Rather, the educational institutions are somehow failing to match graduates' skills with the demands of the job market (Allen, J. & van der Velden, R.,2001).

Hence, it becomes crucial to shed light on some of the most important soft skills that Algerian youths need to develop in order to look for a decent job and pursue a successful professional career, therefore bridge the gap between Algerian youth skills' mismatch and unemployment on one hand, and the job market needs and requirements on the other hand.

Accordingly, this study aims at exploring EFL students self-perceived level of soft skills at Badji Mokhtar Annaba University. A questionnaire was handed out to thirty-nine 3rd year and master II EFL students in order to investigate EFL student's assessment of their soft skills which are supposed to be taught implicitly at university in parallel with technical skills.

2. Defining Soft Skills

Soft skills have been defined as "a broad set of skills, competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable people to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals" (Lippman, et al, 2015). Soft skills often fall into two domains—intrapersonal, or managing the

self, and interpersonal, or relating to others. Some also include certain cognitive or higher-order thinking skills within the soft skills domain, such as critical thinking and problem solving (Honeyman, 2019).

3. Challenges Youth Encounter when Searching for Job

World Learning Algeria (Non-governmental American organization) launched a project for promoting youth employment in Algeria: "Youth Employment Project" (YEP), and it was implemented by World Learning in partnership with nine Algerian technical and vocational institutes (Honeyman, 2019).

Under the YEP project, they carried out a qualitative research with 90 employed and unemployed young women and men in six *wilayas* of Algeria, and collected data from interviews with employers around the country (Honeyman, 2019). The research investigated the difficulties Algerian youths face when searching for work, the obtained results can be categorized under three dimensions: negative external factors, personal weaknesses and skills gap from the employer perspective.

3.1 Negative External Factors

Honeyman (2019) reported that participants in the YEP project of both sexes, both employed and unemployed, cited a wide range of external factors that had hindered their job search. Both employed and unemployed young women listed the same essential set of external factors that negatively affect the job search in Algeria. This set included lack of experience; with women stating that institutes and universities do not provide practical experience or internships and so young graduates are not attractive to employers; and lack of job openings in general, in one's specific field, or in one's field and place of residence.

Honeyman (2019) said that women mentioned the difficulty of isolation and distance between available jobs and the location of their residence; nepotism; and the sense that the intermediary role played by ANEM (the National Employment Agency -Agence Nationale de l'Emploi) between job-seekers and employers often slowed down the job search instead of facilitating it. Respondents also had a keen sense of injustice about the low wages usually offered to them and the various employment practices they perceived as unfair.

In addition, Honeyman (2019) added that young women mentioned the factor of industries that discriminate against women, hiring women only if they are pretty, not hiring women in certain fields, or not hiring a woman who wears the veil for certain positions (such as salesperson). Interestingly, at least some young men also mentioned gender discrimination—this time in favor of women, as they were perceived to be willing to work for less.

Honeyman (2019) also revealed that both employed and unemployed young men talked about a similar range of issues: nepotism and people hiring someone they already know, especially in the public sector; the need for men to complete compulsory military service (which is signified by possessing "la carte jaune"); and the general lack of job opportunities. Young men also mentioned government policy and institution-related issues, including lack of responsiveness from ANEM, ANEM's requirements for local residence, and an over-reliance on the government's subsidized employment program for youth, the Contrat de Travail Assisté (CTA).

Finally, several young men mentioned that disorganized and inadequate recruiting methods, as well as lack of transparency, do not give candidates a fair chance.

3.2 Personal Weaknesses

Honeyman (2019) also declared that the qualitative research under the YEP project, asked participants to reflect on personal weaknesses that had negatively impacted their job search. In response, research participants mentioned both soft skills and functional job search skills they felt they were lacking.

Overall, the soft skills that seemed to pose the greatest challenge to these youth negatively impacting their job search were: communication skills, social skills (including networking), positive self-concept and self- confidence, managing stress, self- motivation and initiative, and planning and time management (Honeyman, 2019). While both men and women mentioned each of these, weaknesses in stress management and time management were more frequently mentioned by women than by men. Other soft skills weaknesses mentioned by fewer participants included adaptability and flexibility, persuasiveness and negotiation, goal-setting, persistence and determination, assertiveness, problem-solving, and optimism or overcoming negative thoughts (Honeyman, 2019).

Table 1. Soft skills gap reported by youth

Soft Skills-Related Areas of Weakness	Degree of Weakness
Communication skills	Widespread
Social skills (including networking)	Widespread
Positive self-concept, self-confidence	Widespread
Managing emotions, stress management	Widespread-primarily female
Self-motivation, initiative, autonomy	Moderate
Planning, time management, efficiency	Moderate-primarily female

Source: Catherine A. Honeyman (2019), Soft Skills for Youth Employment in Algeria: Qualitative Research Report. Washington, Dc: World Learning, Inc., p.15.

According to Honeyman (2019), the weakest skills for both men and women, are communication skills, social skills, including the ability to network and build relationships with contacts and positive self-concept or self- confidence.

Regarding communication skills specifically, Honeyman (2019) noted that they include both speaking skills and self- presentation or body language.

Whereas social skills are important to participants in terms of working with others, but especially due to the need to build a network of relationships that could help them learn more about available jobs and opportunities.

Both men and women also discussed their lack of self-confidence, also referred to as "positive self-concept" or "realistic self-esteem" in the soft skills literature (Gates, et al, 2016).

Another challenge faced by both men and women, though reported to a slightly less widespread degree, was self-motivation and initiative.

Interestingly, there were two soft skills weaknesses mentioned significantly more frequently by young women than by young men: managing stress, and time management or planning. A few young men and several young women talked about stress in relation to the job search process itself, and difficult communication situations such as interviews (Honeyman, 2019).

Many youths also mentioned functional employability skills they struggle with, including languages (primarily French but also English); specific technical and vocational skills, almost universally related to IT and software; and the need to gain practical experience

applying the theories they had learned in school and university. They also mentioned challenges with job interviews, understanding the job search process, CV writing, and career planning. The need for improved skills in career planning was mentioned only by young women (Honeyman, 2019).

Table 2. Functional skills gaps reported by youth

Functional Skills-Related Areas of Weakness	Degree of Weakness
Languages (English, French)	Widespread
IT/software skills	Widespread
Practical Experience	Widespread
Job interviews	Widespread
Job search process	Moderate
CV writing	Moderate
Career planning	Moderate

Source: Catherine A. Honeyman (2019), Soft Skills for Youth Employment in Algeria: Qualitative Research Report. Washington, Dc: World Learning, Inc., p.17.

Regarding language skills, Honeyman (2019) revealed that both young women and young men signaled their need to improve in French or English, and sometimes in both languages, in order to perform better during their employment search. Both young men and young women also signaled the need to learn certain computer or software skills in order to gain better access to employment in their fields. In addition, both men and women talked about their struggles with understanding the job search process, preparing for job interviews, and preparing a quality CV customized to the job opportunity.

The one functional job search skill that showed a gender difference was that of career planning. A number of young women specifically identified this as a personal weakness, while no young men mentioned it.

3.3 Employer Perspectives

Honeyman (2019) also reported that the YEP project conducted a labor market analysis in each of the six *wilayas* where the project

has been implemented, in order to provide an overview of soft skills gaps in Algeria from the employer perspective. Interviews with employers in each site suggest that employers strongly consider factors such as professional self- presentation in dress and speech, conscientiousness or being hardworking and dependable, communication skills including (but not limited to) proficiency in English and French, positive self-concept and self-confidence, time management and planning, self-motivation and initiative, having long-term career goals and the associated loyalty to a company, stress management, social skills and appropriate behavior with colleagues and customers, and problem-solving skills. Employers perceive many of these as lacking in the youth they interview, and particularly in those they choose not to hire.

To sum up, according to the challenges stated above, youth and employers alike recognized the need for communication skills in English and French, positive self-concept or self-confidence, time management and planning, self-motivation and initiative, and stress management. Exceptions include employers' interest in loyalty, as a facet of having longer-term career plans and goals, their addition of customer service skills as part of the social skill set employees need, and their concern with conscientiousness or a strong and dependable work ethic, problem-solving skills, and professional self-presentation (Honeyman, 2019).

4. The Skills Youth Need to Gain Employment in Algeria

According to Honeyman (2019), the same qualitative research under the YEP project suggests that Algerian youth most need to develop 12 specific soft skills in the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and cognitive domains, as well as 6 core functional job search skills (see Figure 1), in order to overcome the obstacles they face, gain access to employment, or create their own business.

Figure 1. 18 skills Algerian youth need to gain employment

Intrapersonal	Interpersonal	Cognitive	Functional Skills
Positive self-concept	Social skills	Problem-solving	Language skills
Self-motivation	Communication skills	Planning & Time management	IT/Software skills
Perseverance	Professionalism		Career planning
Adaptability			Job search strategies
Managing emotions			CVs and online profiles
Goal-orientation			Job interviews
Conscientiousness			

Source: Catherine A. Honeyman (2019), Soft Skills for Youth Employment in Algeria: Qualitative Research Report. Washington, Dc: World Learning, Inc., p.23.

Soft skills do not have to be, and often cannot be; developed on their own. It makes most sense to develop them alongside more functional or concrete skills. Practical activities that build those functional skills can be designed to promote soft skills development at the same time. For this to be effective, youths need to know which soft skills to be emphasized on and why, understand the concept of each soft skill and be able to identify it in action, and have opportunities to practice it themselves, ideally repeatedly over a period of time (Honeyman, 2016).

There is a variety of definitions available in the literature for the majority of the soft skills listed in Figure.1 above. The definitions below present a set of core definitions that can be used to advance training around each of these skills. These definitions draw primarily on a set of recent large-scale literature reviews that examined the research literature on soft skills from the fields of psychology, economics, and education (Lippman et al, 2015).

4.1 Adaptability, flexibility

Receptive to change, capacity to tolerate ambiguity, ability to adapt to the situation as it is. Includes an element of realism or realistic expectations.

4.2 Communication skills

"Communication skills include effective expression, transmission, understanding, and interpretation of knowledge and ideas." (Lippman et al, 2015)

4.3 Conscientious, hardworking, dependable

Conscientious, hardworking, dependable is "the ability to "perform tasks with thoroughness and effort from start to finish where one can be counted on to follow through on commitments and responsibilities" (Lippman, Moore et al., 2013). In order to be hardworking and dependable, one must also possess other skills including integrity/ethics, self-motivation, and self-control. (Lippman et al, 2015)

4.4 Goal-orientation, goal-setting

Goal orientation is defined as the motivation and ability to make viable plans and take action toward desired goals (Lippman et al., 2014). Goal orientation is closely tied with positive self-concept, since it relates to individuals' beliefs about their abilities to accomplish specific goals. (Gates et al, 2016)

4.5 Managing emotions, Self-control

"Self-control refers to one's ability to delay gratification, control impulses, direct and focus attention, manage emotions, and regulate behaviors. Someone with a high proficiency in self-control is able to focus on tasks and manage his/her behavior despite distractions or incentives to do otherwise. Self-control is foundational to social skills, communication, being hardworking and dependable, teamwork, leadership, problem solving, critical thinking, and decision-making." (Lippman et al, 2015)

4.6 Perseverance, persistence, determination, grit

Perseverance is "continued effort to do or achieve something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition" (Merriam-Webster, standard definition). It is related to "grit", which has been defined as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (Duckworth et al, 2007).

4.7 Planning and Time management

Planning includes the "ability to form a plan, ability to work with a plan, planning with money, materials, and human resources, thrift, managing projects, efficiency, and time management." Also, "The ability to plan and manage time, money and other resources to achieve goals." (Lippman et al, 2015)

4.8 Positive self-concept

"Positive self-concept includes self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-awareness and beliefs, as well as self-esteem and a sense of well-being and pride. These skills are foundational to a healthy identity and awareness and deployment of one's strengths in the workforce. The emphasis is placed here on self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-efficacy, rather than self-esteem, which has been well-measured and studied, yet is mixed in its relationship to outcomes." (Lippman et al, 2015)

4.9 Problem solving, part of Higher-order thinking

"Higher-order thinking consists of problem solving, critical thinking, and decision-making, which have necessarily been combined here because the research literature reviewed often measured them together as one construct. Each of these skills may reflect the same underlying skill set of identifying an issue and taking in information from multiple sources to evaluate options in order to reach a reasonable conclusion (Stein, 2000)."

4.10 Professionalism

Professionalism is not typically recognized as a "soft skill" or trait in the psychology literature; however, in many employer studies, it is associated with terms such as "punctuality, knowing the importance of personal hygiene and appearance required by the employer, knowing how to change jobs in an appropriate way, business etiquette, appearance and personality, poise, self-presentation" (Lippman et al, 2015). A useful resource from the management training company Mind Tools references the following professional attributes: a commitment to develop and improve one's

skills; competency and reliability; honesty and integrity; accountability for one's actions and mistakes; self-regulation, calm demeanor, and maintaining separation from personal life and feelings; and professional dress, grooming, and etiquette. (MindTools Content Team, n.d)

4.11 Self-motivation and initiative

Self-motivation "describes the desire to do a task and achieve results, pursuing it with enthusiasm, determination, and autonomy. Self-motivation has an emotional component, including the desire to achieve something, but it also involves taking demonstrable action toward that accomplishment. It also has a cognitive component, that is, a focus on an intention and engagement in a task. The related skills of self-control, self-efficacy, and a learning or growth mindset, influence the development of self-motivation. If a youth believes that he or she is capable of achieving his or her goals or tasks, he or she becomes more motivated to accomplish them (Dweck, 2006)."

4.12 Social skills

"Social skills refer to a cluster of skills necessary to get along well with others. Social skills also include respecting others, using context appropriate behavior, and resolving conflict." (Lippman et al, 2015).

5. Career Project Initiatives to Promote Youth Employment in Algeria

5.1 Youth Employment Project (YEP)

The Algeria Youth Employment Project (YEP) was launched by World Learning in Algeria on September 15, 2015 and intended to operate for three years, aiming to reinforce the linkages between young people and the world of work (World Learning Algeria, n.d).
With the support of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI, a program of the U.S. State Department), World Learning launched the project by establishing youth career centers in private vocational training schools in four sites (Adrar, Blida, Ouargla, Sétif). Three further sites were added in the second year (Biskra, El Oued, Oran), followed by a final two schools (Batna, Tizi Ouzou) (World Learning

Algeria, n.d).

With these nine partner schools, World Learning is working along the following axes:

1. The upgrading of training methods and materials to enable the vocational training centers to offer more robust training courses;
2. Vocational trainings that are updated and adapted to the needs of the local markets in specific technical domains;
3. Supplemental trainings in job search and essential professional skills to prepare the young participants to be dynamic, motivated, and conscious recruits;
4. In partnership with Souktel, a regional leader in employability technologies, the rollout of a new job search and matching platform;
5. Internship and job opportunities for young participants with a range of local employers;
6. Reinforced linkages between the technical schools and local businesses to ensure the relevance and sustainability of services offered to young job seekers. (World Learning Algeria, n.d)

5.2 Djazair Ta3mal Youth Employability Portal

"Jazair Ta3mal" is an online employability portal that helps youth and job seekers in Algeria find support to transition into the world of work. It provides resources ranging from entry level job and internship opportunities, to employability and entrepreneurship training, in addition to online career guidance and e-learning through "Tamheed" (Silatech, n.d).

Tamheed delivers highly predictive and user-friendly psychometric assessments online, the results of which can be used for both advice guidance and screening. It includes quality career advice and placement support services, and it provides youth-serving organizations (YSOs) with a complete toolkit for setting up a sustainable career advising practice (Silatech, n.d).

5.3 The Bawsala Mentorship Program

The Bawsala Mentorship Program provides training, mentorship, and networking opportunities to help young Algerian women build their leadership skills and job-readiness skills (World

Learning, n.d).

The Bawsala Mentorship Program is an initiative originally implemented by World Learning in Algiers under the name Maharat Mentorship Program through designed utilizing World Learning Algeria's approach and expertise with youth workforce development. Implemented in close partnership with the U.S. Embassy in Algeria, over 10 months the project successfully helped 70% of participants to obtain internship or job opportunities, with 30% of participants going on to further their studies. Under this new grant, the Bawsala project will expand to cover Algiers and Oran to benefit 50 unemployed Algerian women (World Learning, n.d).

The program aims at enabling young women in Algiers to: gain self-awareness of their personal attributes and skills, build leadership and job-readiness skills, and develop robust relationships with successful female leaders in Algeria (World Learning, n.d).

6. Methodology, Research Questions and Hypotheses

6.1 Methodology

The main aim of this research is to investigate EFL students' self-perception of their level in a series of skills and competences that may be important for success in their professional career. A questionnaire was submitted to 39 (thirty-nine) EFL 3rd year license and Master II language sciences students at the department of English at Badji Mokhtar Annaba University. EFL students were asked to choose the option that best describes their level of competence in the suggested statements. EFL students' questionnaire captures students' assessments of their soft skills. It is a 25-item questionnaire where students state their level of proficiency in the suggested skill as being "Excellent", "very well", "somewhat", and "not at all". The items are grouped according to 8 soft skills' categories suggested by Sunday (2013).

6.2 Research Question and Hypothesis

The following is the major question that can be raised in this research work:

- What is EFL students' self-perceived soft skills level?

We hypothesize that:

- EFL third year license and master II language sciences students at Badji Mokhtar Annaba University have an average level of soft skills

that is necessary to penetrate the labor market, but more competency in those skills is needed.

7. Data Analysis and Research Results
7.1 Data Interpretation

Communication and Problem-Solving Skills	Excel-lent	Very well	Some-what	Not at all
I can speak and write clearly so that others understand	30.8%	59%	10.3%	0%
I can read and understand information in words, graphs, diagrams, or charts	51.3%	41%	7.7%	0%
I listen and ask questions in order to understand instructions and other people's points of view	43.6%	30.8%	25.6%	0%
I can assess situations, identify problems and evaluate solutions	28.2%	59%	12.8%	0%
I recognize the many dimensions of a problem and can determine a root cause	17.9%	51.3%	28.2%	2.6%
I'm not afraid to be creative when solving problems. I like to make sure the solution works in case improvement is required	46.2%	30.8%	20.5%	2.6%

Table 3: Communication and Problem-Solving Skills

As far as communication skills are concerned, the results obtained from table 3 revealed that the majority (89.8%) of students can express themselves and communicate clearly with their classmates. Almost all (92.3%) students have the ability to decipher information from graphs, diagrams or charts. Many (74.4%) students interact actively with other people and can understand their points of view. Hence, a great deal of EFL students have good communication skills that would allow them to interact and integrate easily in the job market, to build healthy relationships with their co-workers or bosses in the work place, and to negotiate well with clients or customers.

As for problem solving skills, a considerable number (87.2%) of students are capable of assessing situations, identifying problems and providing solutions. A lot of (69.2%) students have the potential to recognize the different dimensions of a problem and can easily determine its root cause. A great number (77%) of students asserted that they are not afraid to be creative when solving problems and like to make sure the solution works in case improvement is required.

Therefore, most EFL students are prepared "to a great extent" to thoroughly understand the problems at the workplace, define them, strategize a solution and find alternative solutions when necessary; evaluate them, then implement the best solution, monitor progress and make modifications accordingly. The previously stated problem-solving techniques could be smoothly applied by EFL graduates to approach any problem in the workplace.

Team Work and Independent Study Skills	Excel-lent	Very well	Some-what	Not at all
I work/co-operate well with other students and team leaders	38.5%	43.6%	10.3%	7.7%
I can lead a team work in class	43.6%	28.2%	17.9%	10.3%
I have the skills of negotiating/persuading	25.6%	41%	30.8%	2.6%
I place much value on respect for others	79.5%	17.9%	2.6%	0%
I like learning new things	84.6%	15.4%	0%	0%
I learn from my mistakes and can accept feedback	69.2%	23.1%	7.7%	0%
I can identify and access learning opportunities	35.9%	48.7%	15.4%	0%

Table 4: Team Work and Independent Study Skills

With regard to team work skills, most (82.1%) students admitted that they co-operate well with other students and team leaders. Numerous (71.8) students confirmed that they can lead a team work in class. A good number (66.6%) of students declared that they have the necessary skills for negotiating and persuading. Almost all (97.4%) students asserted that they place much value on respect for others. Accordingly, many EFL students have the qualities and abilities that permit them to work well with others during conversations, projects, meetings, or any other potential collaborations at the workplace. EFL graduates will be required to work alongside others in every industry at every level in their career. Doing so in an effective and responsible manner can help them accomplish career goals and contribute positively to the success of their organization.

Concerning independent study skills, all (100%) students confirmed that they like learning new things. The majority (92.3%) of students avow that they learn from their mistakes and have the ability

to accept feedback. Many (84.6%) students said that they can identify and access learning opportunities. Put simply, independent learning is when students set goals, monitor and evaluate their own academic development, so they can manage their own motivation towards learning. Thus, being able to work independently is a skill highly valued by employers so it may ultimately help graduates in securing a job. In the short term, it may help them to feel more in control of what they are doing as new recruited employees.

Planning, Organizing, Prioritizing and Time Management Skills	Excel-lent	Very well	Some-what	Not at all
I am good at managing time and priorities – setting timelines	30.8%	35.9%	25.6%	7.7%
I am good at taking initiative and making decisions	30.8%	48.7%	17.9%	2.6%
I am good at being resourceful (having the ability to make quick and clever ways to overcome difficulties)	38.5%	41%	20.5%	0%
Setting priorities is not a problem to me	48.7%	38.5%	10.3%	2.6%
I am good at time management; in my work I often meet deadlines	41%	25.6%	25.6%	7.7%
I can manage/do several tasks at once or in parallel	23.1%	48.7%	20.5%	7.7%

Table 5: Planning, Organizing, Prioritizing and Time Management Skills

With respect to planning and organizing skills, a lot of (74.7%) students think they are good at managing time and priorities, and in setting timelines. Most (79.5%) students believe they are good at taking initiative and making decisions. The same number (79.5%) of students feel they have the ability to make quick and clever ways to overcome difficulties. Respectively, planning and organizing is vital at all levels in the workplace. Without those skills, there would be chaos, nothing would get done and everything would be a mess.

About time management and prioritizing skills, the majority (87.2%) of students consider that setting priorities is not a problem for them. A good percentage (66.6%) of students say they often meet deadlines in their work. And many (71.8%) think they are able to manage and do several tasks at once or in parallel. Correspondingly, EFL graduates as future employees, if they manage their time well,

they would be more productive, more efficient, and more likely to meet deadlines. Employers in very industry look for staff that can make optimal use of the time available to them on the job. Saving the time saves the organization money and increases revenue.

Creativity, Innovation and ICT Skills	Excellent	Very well	Somewhat	Not at all
When doing a task, I often devise new ways to do it faster and better	28.2%	53.8%	15.4%	2.6%
I usually come up with creative and innovative ideas during group work	15.4%	48.7%	33.3%	2.6%
I like trying out things myself	69.2%	28.2%	0%	2.6%
I am familiar with word processing	28.2%	51.3%	20.5%	0%
I can browse the internet for information for my study and to do assignments	66.7%	28.2%	5.1%	0%
I am familiar with the use of emails to send and receive mails	69.2%	20.5%	10.3%	0%

Table 6: Creativity, Innovation and ICT Skills

As far as creativity and innovation skills are concerned, a big number (82%) of students declared that when doing a task, they often devise new ways to do it faster and better. A considerable number (64.1%) of students affirmed that they usually come up with creative and innovative ideas during group work. And almost all (97.4%) of them like to try out things themselves. Thus, with the ability to think creatively and outside of the box, EFL graduates in the workplace are more likely to come up with unique and innovative solutions to obstacles they may encounter. This creativity in solving problems can lead to new ways to accomplish tasks and permits to more efficiently run any business.

With regard to ICT skills, the majority (79.5%) of students mention they are familiar with word processing. Nearly all (94.9%) students say they are able to browse the internet for information for their study or to do assignments. Most (89.7%) of them report they are familiar with the use of emails to send and receive mails. Accordingly, the main reason ICT skills are needed in the workplace is that they allow humans to do their work faster, more efficiently and with fewer wasted resources. Employees equipped with ICT skills are more flexible in where, when and how they work, and this also gives rise to the concept of mobile or virtual offices, where employees work

remotely from home or any place they are in, with a flexible time schedule.

7.2 Discussing the Results

According to the obtained results from the students' questionnaire, and with reference to the previously mentioned hypothesis, we conclude that EFL 3rd year license and master II students at Badji Mokhtar Annaba University not only can be considered to have an average level of soft skills that is necessary to penetrate the job market, but the findings proved that most EFL students according to their perception have a decent level of the skills required and recommended by job seekers. The teaching practices at university implicitly teach soft skills in parallel with teaching hard or technical skills to students. Yet, much more is needed from all educational and academic staff to produce skilled graduates equipped with the necessary skills that would facilitate the insertion of EFL graduates in the job market. More efforts are needed from curriculum designers, Quality Assurance Cells, teacher trainers, and even job providers need to collaborate more with universities to provide internships and training sessions to EFL graduates.

8. Conclusion

In this study, we highlighted the importance of soft skills for Algerian youth employment.

After defining the concept of soft skills, we have first identified the challenges Algerian youths face when searching for work, they are categorized under three dimensions ranging into negative external factors, personal weaknesses and skills gap from the employer perspective.

Second, we have suggested a set of important specific skills namely twelve soft skills and six functional skills which would help the Algerian youths to overcome obstacles related to job search and pursue a successful professional career.

Third, we presented career project initiatives established in Algeria that have already succeeded in building a considerable set of soft skills among Algerian youths who are searching for job.

Finally, we carried out a questionnaire with EFL students at Badji Mokhtar Annaba University in order to identify their self-perceived level in soft skills. The findings proved that EFL students

believe they have a decent level in these essential skills. Even if the conclusions are based on students self-perceived ability and ease at using soft skills, results can be relatively reliable as they translate some self confidence that can only be generated by successful endeavors. However, much more effort is still needed to confirm these feelings and perception into actual evaluated skills.

This paper attempted to demonstrate the link between soft skills and employment, and how soft skills would bridge the gap between job seekers and job market needs and requirements.

9. References

Allen, J. & van der Velden, R. (2001). Educational Mismatches versus Skill Mismatches: Effects on Wages, Job Satisfaction, and On-the-Job Search, Oxford Economic Papers (53), pp. 434-52.

Cappelli, P. (2012). Why Good People Can't Get Jobs: The Skills Gap and What Companies Can Do About It, Philadelphia: Wharton Digital Press.

Duckworth, A. L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M. D., & Kelly, D. R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 92*(6), 1087–1101. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.6.1087

Dweck, C. S. (2006). Mindset: The new psychology of success. New York: Random House.

Gates, S., Lippman, L., Shadowen, N., Burke, H., Diener, O., and Malkin, M. (2016). Key Soft Skills for Cross-Sectoral Youth Outcomes. Washington, DC: USAID's YouthPower: Implementation, YouthPower Action.

Honeyman, C. (2016). Soft skills development: Guiding notes for project and curriculum design and evaluation. Washington, Dc: World Learning, Inc.

Honeyman, C. (2019). Soft Skills for Youth Employment in Algeria: Qualitative Research Report. Washington, Dc: World Learning, Inc.

Kovačič, H. (2009). Collaboration between Employers and Higher Education Institutions. In Pavlin S. (ed.): Report on the Qualitative Analysis of Higher Education Institutions and Employers in Five Countries: Development of Competencies in the World of Work and Education. Hegesco Project. Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana.

Lippman, L. H., Ryberg, R., Terzian, M., Moore, K. A., Humble, J., & McIntosh, H. (2013). Positive and protective factors in adolescent well--being. In B. Asher, F. Casas, I. Frones, & J. E. Korbin (Eds.), The Handbook of Child Well-Being: Theories, Methods, and Policies in Global Perspective. New York: Springer.

Lippman, L.H, Moore, K., Guzman, L., Ryberg, R., McIntosh, H., Ramos, M., Caal, S., Carle, A., Kuhfeld, M. (2014). Flourishing Children:

Defining and Testing Indicators of Positive Development. Heidelberg: Springer Science and Business Media.

Lippman, L., Ryberg, R., Carney, R., and Moore, K. (2015). Key soft skills that foster youth workforce success: toward a consensus across fields. Washington, Dc: Child Trends and USAID YouthPower.

Mind Tools Content Team, (n.d). Professionalism: Meeting the Standards That Matter. Retrieved from: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/professionalism.htm

OECD & EC. (2012). A Guiding Framework for Entrepreneurial Universities. Final version 18th December 2012. OECD LEED Forum and the European Commission, DG for Education and Culture Publishing. Available online at: https://www.oecd.org/site/cfecpr/EC-OECD EntrepreneurialUniversities Framework.pdf

Silatech, (n.d). Djazair Ta3mal Youth Employability Portal. Retrieved from: https://silatech.org/algeria/#1545565246890-a417f3ac-7792

Stein, S. (2000). Equipped for the future content standards: What adults need to know and be able to do in the 21st century. Washington, DC: National Institution for Literacy.

Sunday, N.H. (2013). Assessment of employability skills development opportunities for senior secondary school chemistry students. Journal of Educational Research and Reviews Vol. 1(2), pp. 16-26.

Technopolis Organization. (2011). University Business Cooperation – 15 Institutional Case Studies on the Links between Higher Education Institutions and Business. European Commission, DG for Education and Culture.

World Learning, (n.d). Bawsala Mentorship Program. Retrieved from: https://www.worldlearning.org/program/maharat-mentorship-program-in-algeria/

World Learning Algeria, (n.d).Youth Employment Project. Retrieved from: https://algeria.worldlearning.org/youth-employment-project/