

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Does Soft Skills Training Affect Youth Employment? Evidences from Turkey

Demet Özocaklı¹ - Saliha Emre Deveci² - Lejla I. Leric³ - Neriman Ljevo⁴

¹ Asst. Prof. Dr. Gaziantep University
Foreign Trade Department,
Gaziantep/Türkiye
ORCID: [0000-0003-3766-7012](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3766-7012)
E-Mail:
dozocakli@gantep.edu.tr

² Asst. Prof. Dr. Gaziantep University
Management and Organization
Department, Gaziantep/Türkiye
ORCID: [0000-0001-8881-0355](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8881-0355)
E-Mail:
salihaemre@gantep.edu.tr

³ Teacher Assistant, PhD, Hercegovina
University, Psychology Department,
Mostar/Bosna&Herzegovina
ORCID: [0009-0008-1406-3535](https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1406-3535)
E-Mail:
studentska.fdzmb@hercegovina.edu.ba

⁴ Junior Professor, PhD, University of
Travnik University, Faculty of
Management and Business Economy,
Kiseljak/ Bosna&Herzegovina
ORCID: [0000-0001-8906-8092](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8906-8092)
E-Mail:
nerman.ljevo@fmpe.edu.ba

Corresponding Author:
Demet Özocaklı

January 2025

Volume:22

Issue:1

DOI: 10.26466/opusjsr.1579898

Citation:

Özocaklı, D. & Emre Deveci, S. &
Leric, L.I. & Ljevo, N. (2024). Does soft
skills training affect youth
employment? Evidences from Turkey
OPUS– Journal of Society Research,
22(1), 64-77.

Abstract

In today's fast-paced, ever-changing labor market, soft skills are in high demand, especially for new graduates. This study examined the impact of soft skills training on youth employment. As the first sample, the quantitative research method was conducted by applying a questionnaire to the students of Gaziantep University Vocational School of Social Sciences in Turkey. As the second sample, a qualitative research method was conducted by selecting HR Managers homogeneously according to the statistical regional classification throughout Turkey and conducting interviews focusing on the soft skills of new graduates. Based on the results of our analysis, 14 required soft skills were identified. In cooperation with European Union countries, a training curriculum was designed using these 14 soft skills. Participants of the training program were randomly divided into control and experimental groups. The experimental group was only included in the soft skills training program. The employment rates of both groups were compared after nine months of follow-up. The findings showed that soft skills training resulted in higher employment rates.. The findings show that soft-skills training resulted in higher employment rates. Based on our findings, we propose that universities design and apply soft-skills curricula for young undergraduate and vocational school students to increase youth employment. Moreover, soft skills development must be considered when designing and conducting training programs for workers in public institutions and companies.

Keywords: Soft skill training, youth employment, experimental research method, qualitative research method, quantitative research method

Öz

Günümüüzün hızlı tempolu ve sürekli değişen işgücü piyasasında, özellikle yeni mezunlar için sosyal beceriler yüksek talep görmektedir. Bu çalışma, sosyal beceri eğitiminin genç istihdamı üzerindeki etkisini incelemiştir. İlk örneklem olarak, Türkiye'deki Gaziantep Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Meslek Yüksekokulu öğrencilerine anket uygulanarak nicel araştırma metodu yürütülmüştür. İkinci örneklem olarak, Türkiye genelinde istatistiki bölge sınıflandırmasına göre homojen bir şekilde İK Yöneticileri seçilerek yeni mezunların sosyal becerilerine odaklanan görüşmelerle nitel araştırma metodu yürütülmüştür. Analiz sonuçlarımıza dayanarak, gerekli görülen 14 sosyal beceri belirlenmiştir. Avrupa Birliği ülkeleriyle işbirliği içinde, bu 14 sosyal beceriyi kullanarak bir eğitim müfredatı tasarlanmıştır. Eğitim programına katılanlar rastgele kontrol ve deney gruplarına ayrılmıştır. Deney grubu sadece yumuşak beceri eğitim programına dahil edilmiştir. Her iki grubun istihdam oranları dokuz ay boyunca takip edildikten sonra karşılaştırılmıştır. Bulgular, yumuşak beceri eğitiminin daha yüksek istihdam oranlarıyla sonuçlandığını göstermiştir. Bulgularımıza dayanarak, üniversitelerin genç istihdamını arttırmak için genç lisans ve meslek okulu öğrencileri için yumuşak beceri müfredatı tasarımlarını ve uygulamalarını öneriyoruz. Ayrıca, kamu kurumları ve şirketlerde çalışanlar için eğitim programları tasarlanırken ve yürütülürken yumuşak becerilerin geliştirilmesi göz önünde bulundurulmalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İnce beceri eğitimi, genç istihdamı, deneysel araştırma yöntemi, nitel araştırma yöntemi, nicel araştırma yöntemi

Introduction

The global youth unemployment rate in 2023 was 13.3%, 3.5 times the adult unemployment rate (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2024). It is much higher in developing countries. The youth unemployment rate in Turkey, a developing and upper middle-income country, was approximately 17.9% in 2023 (Figure 1). Moreover, the youth unemployment rate appears to be fragile in extraordinary situations, such as crises and pandemics. These high-level rates and fragilities concern the future labor market.

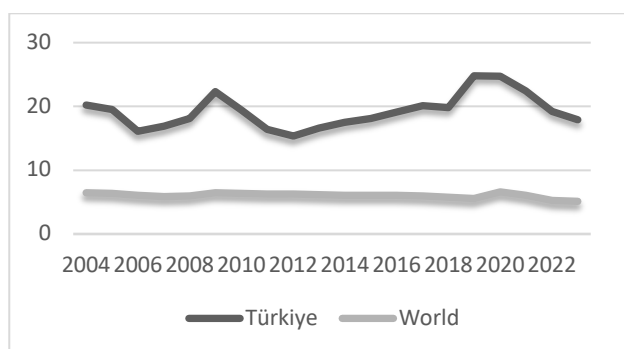


Figure 1. Youth unemployment rates (Source: International Labor Organization, 2024)

Labor market changes have been caused by multiple crises, rapid technological developments, globalization, and shifts in demographics and migrant populations. While social and economic transformations create new jobs, many older jobs disappear. In addition, the mismatch between technical and core (soft) skills worsens owing to the inequalities in access to education, training, and digital technology (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2023).

Recruitment experts no longer hire people who can perform flexible, creative, and judgmental tasks through technological development and automation (Ibourk & Aynaoui, 2023). Changing world characteristics through large and more integrated organizations and global connections is driving the growing demand for highly skilled workers that traditional high-tech education cannot provide (Murgor, 2017). Today, employers not only consider technical skills but also soft skills in recruitment (Murgor, 2017; Vasanthakumari, 2019). Sufficient soft skills levels positively affect

employability, success, and creative output (R. K. Wats & M. Wats, 2009).

In economic theory, labor productivity is emphasized to affect employment level. Technological developments and a person's technical knowledge determine labor productivity. Further, people's soft skills positively impact labor productivity (Wats & Wats, 2009). Thus, employers today consider not only technical skills while recruiting, but also soft skills, especially in the case of young candidates (Vasanthakumari, 2019).

Technical skills consist of technical and administrative knowledge (Dixon, Belnap, Albrecht & Lee 2010). Technical skills alone are insufficient for recruitment and long-term continuity of employment (R. F. James and M. L. James, 2004), and soft skills are increasingly being discussed in the recruitment process and employment continuity. With technological changes and automation, recruiters have started hiring people who can perform open-ended tasks requiring flexibility, creativity, and judgment. Recruiters state that a machine is often better than a human at performing routine tasks that can be codified according to a clear set of rules, but social interaction is one of the most essential tasks in the workplace, and there is currently no substitute for humans regarding social interaction. Technological machines cannot participate in flexible teamwork increasingly required in the modern economy (Ibourk & Aynaoui, 2023). Moreover, soft skills are necessary to face the challenges of the labor market [16]. Sufficient soft skills level will positively affect employability, success, and creative output (Wats & Wats, 2009).

Soft skills are generally defined as traits that encompass attitudes, habits, and interactions with other people. These skills make people better employees and provide opportunities indirectly related to technology. In other words, soft skills refer to one's ability to relate to others, organize oneself and others, and communicate in written, oral, or other ways (Geffel & Park, 2016). A study on soft skills conducted at Boston University and the University of Michigan Ross School of Business determined that employees who receive soft-skills training are 12% more productive than those who

do not. A study of Fortune 500 CEOs by the Stanford Research Institute and the Carnegie Mellon Foundation found that 75% of long-term business success comes from mastery of soft skills and only 25% from technical skills. Similarly, Harvard University reported that 85% of workplace success is attributed to soft skills and only 15% to technical skills (Vasanthakumari, 2019). Research conducted in different countries and market segments shows that soft skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork, are the most desired soft skills by companies (Robles, 2012; Sharma, 2018). A study conducted with a sample of 173 people in the retail sector in the UK found that soft skills formed the backbone of the retail sector, and these skills were essential for both senior and entry-level positions in the organization (Nickson, Warhurst, Commander, Hurrell & Cullen, 2012).

Soft skills are important in both private and public sectors. Ward & Riddle (2014) created an employment readiness scale (ERS) to include soft-skills development in daily employment services within the scope of social work in Canada. This scale consists of soft skills, such as the ability to get help, customer's feeling of being able to take responsibility for being successful, and ability to continue the job. Another study revealed the most important soft skills for professors and teachers as resilience, reflexivity, empathy, collaborative working, self-efficacy, creativity, and effective communication (Fernandes, Jardim & Lopes, 2021). Today, people with advanced technical skills but weak soft skills face recruitment challenges and experience adaptation problems even if hired (Kolesnik, Oliinyk, Komarivska, Kazmirchuk & Imber, 2023).

Discussions continue on whether a sufficient soft-skills level in candidates positively affects the recruitment processes and continuity of employment. While Evenson (1999), states that students' development of soft skills positively impacts the employment process, Klaus (2010), indicates that apart from technical and professional skills, people whose interpersonal skills have not developed can be prevented from their promising careers. Moss & Tilly (1996), conducted face-to-face interviews with 56 human

resource (HR) managers in four industries in the Los Angeles and Detroit Metropolitan areas between 1991 and 1992 regarding the importance of soft skills during recruitment. The findings show that soft skills, especially motivation and communication skills, are important in recruitment because of competitive market conditions. Further, the soft skills of black Americans were found to be inadequate compared to those of others, putting the former at a disadvantage in the labor market. Singh & Jaykumar (2019), surveyed employers, faculty, and students to investigate the soft skills graduates should possess for employment in India's hospitality industry. Communication, business ethics, teamwork, interpersonal skills, and customer service skills were determined as the most important ones. Employers demand graduates with the right attitudes, technical knowledge, and soft skills.

For students, critical thinking and work ethics are important soft skills for obtaining a job. Crawford & Dalton (2016), determined the soft skills necessary for building an environment for students in the US and identified soft skill differences between sectors. Their study of 7548 participants found that soft skills such as communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and self-management are essential for recruiters. Research conducted for agricultural services, education and information development, building environment, product creation and manufacturing, government, human and animal health, and medical services determined the differences in soft skills needs between these sectors. Of the seven different indicators determined for each soft skill, effective listening, and decision-making for communication skills, identifying and analyzing issues for problem-solving, and efficient and effective working for self-management are the most preferred.

In addition, skills such as professionalism and leadership can be learned after starting a job. Mansura & Kashfia (2018) investigated the soft skills business graduates entering the labor market in Bangladesh should possess. They analyzed 3996 job postings on two major online job sites. Soft skills were identified as the most frequently

mentioned skills in the 415 entry-level job postings for business graduates. The preferred soft skills consist of verbal and written communication skills, interpersonal skills, ability to work under pressure, team spirit, analytical thinking ability, self-motivation, being result- and goal-oriented, leadership, problem-solving, and proactivity. Sławińska & Villani (2014) researched soft skills that employers demand within the scope of "The Learning Partnership of the Soft-Skills Project." The results show that employers desire people with good communication skills, strong work ethics, initiative, interpersonal skills, and problem-solving abilities. Additionally, teamwork and confidence are considered vital for success in the workplace.

The increasing demand for soft skills has increased the number of practices aimed at developing them. In many developing countries, soft skill development is integral to youth employment programs. World Bank (2006), implemented a "soft-skills training component" within the scope of the Entra 21 program in Latin America. Employers reported that participants selected from among their employees developed more soft skills for teamwork and taking responsibility than non-selected employees. Murgor (2017), implemented a training program that covered the soft skills required for self-employment of 320 graduates randomly selected from among 527 technical and vocational education and training graduates in Uasin Gishu, Kenya. Soft skills discussed in this training were time management, problem-solving, independent work, interpersonal skills, communication, decision-making, creativity, and adaptability. The sufficiency of the soft-skills training required for self-employment was also investigated using qualitative analysis, revealing that while time management was sufficient among the soft skills, adaptability was insufficient. Technical and vocational education and training graduates did not possess the soft skills required to be successful in self-employment. Soft skills such as problem-solving, independent work, interpersonal skills, and creativity had statistically significant effects. Such soft skills are not in the curriculum but are in

voluntary extracurricular curricula. Adding such soft skills to the curriculum will yield positive results, especially in countries with high unemployment, and cooperation with employers is necessary. Sheikh, Abdalkrim & Shehawy (2023), organized training for business administration students on the 24 soft skills deemed essential to be successful in business life through an experimental teaching method, such as a business simulation that consist of one-week workshop. Student feedback after the simulation revealed that the development of these skills was significantly affected.

Furthermore, Sebastião, Trapicos, Payan-Carreira & Rebelo (2023), interviewed eight HR managers and six employers about the technical and soft skills of different higher education programs within the scope of the Think4Jobs Project. They found that technical and soft skills should be coordinated, and motivation, creativity, interpersonal relationships, communication, entrepreneurship, and critical thinking are the soft skills important to educators and employers. Emanuel, Ricchiardi, Sanseverino & Ghislieri (2021), tested the effectiveness of soft skills in supporting the academic success of first-year students in an online course prepared to develop 12 soft skills at the University of Turin; their findings demonstrate the effectiveness of this method. Ramos-Monge, Fox & Garcia-Piquer (2023), determined the soft skills university students in Spain needed to be employable and successful in digital environments. Using natural language processing (NLP) techniques, they analyzed the writings of 226 students describing their experiences of failure in academic, personal, and professional settings. The students were found to have deficiencies in social intelligence, stress management, and self-intelligence skills.

Some studies have addressed the impact of developing soft skills through training programs on the employment market. Groh, Krishnan, McKenzie & Vishwanath (2012), compared the effects of wage subsidy implementation and soft-skills training on women's employment in Jordan. The randomly selected participants were divided into four groups. For the first group, the employer

was provided a subsidy payment voucher equal to the minimum wage for up to six months, while for the second group, 45 hours of training was imparted on soft skills specified by the employers. For the third group, both practices were used, and for the fourth group, no application was made. The findings suggest that the wage subsidy increased employment by 40% in the short term, but most employment was unregistered, and the employment effect became statistically insignificant within four months after the payment voucher ended. Another finding was that the employment effects of participants outside the capital were permanent, but this situation reflected the effects of displacement. Soft-skills training had no average impact and little positive impact outside the capital city. Groh, Krishnan, McKenzie & Vishwa (2016), provide empirical evidence on the effectiveness of soft-skills training in employing young Jordanian women within the scope of "The Jordan New Opportunities for Women" project. The control group consisted of 748 women randomly selected to participate in a 45-hour soft-skills training course for 2-year community college graduates. The experimental group comprised 599 women. The training given to the control group addressed the soft skills (effective communication, writing skills, teamwork, time management, positive thinking and its use in business life, customer service, resume creation, and interview skills) that employers expect from candidates but believe to be inadequate. The employment follow-up surveys conducted in the 6th, 14th, and 27th months found that despite this training program being longer than other similar programs, and the course being conducted by a reputable provider, soft-skills training does not have any significant employment impact in the short and medium term. Literature on the effects of soft skills on employment has focused on either which soft skills are missing or necessary from the professionals' perspective or developing soft skills through various training practices and experimental methods. Applying these studies to different samples, such as sex, sector, race, and education level, has caused the results to differ. However, there is consensus in the

literature that soft skills are considered in employability and continuity of employment.

Therefore, this study explores how the employability of the youth can be facilitated by improving the soft skills of young vocational school graduates entering the labor market and emphasizes the upskilling of youth. Research and Publication Ethics were followed in this study.

In the present study, we examined the impact of 14 soft skills on the employment of the graduates of Gaziantep University Vocational School of Social Sciences. Various aspects of this study contribute to existing literature. First, the study was designed such that questions were asked from HR experts through interviews and the graduates through surveys simultaneously. Thus, we revealed 14 soft skills that represent real needs. Second, we designed a 40-hour training curriculum with international cooperation. Third, we divided our sample into two groups (experimental group and control group) focusing on graduates of Gaziantep University Vocational School of Social Sciences. We implemented the training curriculum for only the experimental group that was selected randomly. Fourth, we applied employment measurements in both the control and experimental groups to understand the employment differences between the two groups. Further, we conducted a follow-up every two months for nine months, asking both groups whether they were employed.

Methodology

This study included two samples. The first sample, "Students," comprised 302 graduate students of different departments of the Social Sciences Vocational School at Gaziantep University, such as banking and insurance, child development, foreign trade, business administration, marketing, accounting, and taxation. Students were administered a questionnaire containing the following elements: 1 demographic data (gender, department) and data on soft skills that are mostly possessed by students (communication skills, flexibility, work ethic, stress management, decision making, positive attitude, problem-solving,

¹ See Appendix

adaptability, proactivity, creativity, commitment, time management, responsibility, self-awareness, innovation, integrity, teamwork, reliability, empathy, and critical thinking). These soft skills were evaluated on a self-assessment five-point Likert Scale from 1 to 5.

The second sample, "Human Resource Managers," comprised 63 managers of individual companies selected homogeneously according to statistical regions in Turkey. The companies were from different fields (construction, tourism, technology, software, iron production, food, metallurgy, and education). Face-to-face qualitative interviews were conducted with the managers with pre-prepared questions. During the qualitative interview process, the managers answered the following questions regarding the new graduates preparing to enter the labor market: What soft skills do they consider? What are the most important soft skills? What soft skills are decisive in recruitment? What soft skills make new graduates competitive? Which soft skills should they possess? Which skills are the strongest or weakest? How can soft skills be developed? Which skills should be prioritized in training?

The collected data were processed in the SPSS statistical data processing program. All study participants provided informed consent, and the study design was approved by the appropriate ethics review board at Gaziantep University Social Sciences and Humanities Ethics Committee.

The basic methods used were descriptive statistics: arithmetic mean, mode, median, and standard deviation. After comparing the results recorded for the two samples, differences between the expectations of HR Managers and Students' soft skills were found. We identified the most desirable qualities (soft skills) that employers were looking for and that the unemployed/students should possess. With international cooperation, we designed a 40-hour informal training curriculum, consisting of 14 soft skills (communication, collaboration, creativity, stress management, personal distance, problem-solving,

time management, dedication, responsibility, harmony, proactiveness, respect, positive attitude, and critical thinking). Subsequently, applications were accepted from graduate students to participate in the soft-skills training. An experimental group was created by randomly selecting members from the applications received. The remaining group was referred to as the control group. The training curriculum was prepared for the experimental group and implemented within 10 days. This curriculum was conducted practically, attended by experts, and through various simulations.

Employment follow-up surveys were administered to both the control and experimental groups every two months, that is, four times after conducting the soft-skills training curriculum.² The employment rates for both groups were reported using four different measures.

Findings

Sample 1: Students

In the first sample, A total of 302 students from different departments participated in the study, 63.9% of them females. Table 1 presents the programs of study. Of the total number of respondents, the highest belonged to the Banking and Insurance program (25.2%), followed by the Business Management (14.9%) and Child Development Programs (12.9%). The positioning of certain soft skills in the sample is presented in Figure 2, which shows that the highest average value in the observed sample is Integrity (Mean=4.500), followed by Reliability (Mean = 4.4906) and Work Ethic (Mean = 4.4601). Positive Attitude (Mean = 3.8560), Critical Thinking (Mean = 3.9721), and Stress Management (Mean = 4.0822) have the lowest values in soft skills in the observed sample.

² The soft skills training curriculum was implemented in July 2023. Further, employment follow-up surveys were administered on October 2023, December 2023, February 2024, and April 2024.

Table 1. Programs of study of the students in the sample

Department	Frequency	Percentage Share
Foreign Trade Program	33	10.9
Accounting and Tax Applications Program	32	10.6
Banking and Insurance Program	76	25.2
Child Development Program	39	12.9
Marketing Program	3	1.0
Office Management and Executive Assistance Program	28	9.3
Call Center Service Program	22	7.3
Securities and Capital Markets Program	14	4.6
E-Commerce and Marketing Program	10	3.3
Business Management Program	45	14.9
Total	302	100.0

skills are very important and essential to daily operations.

The HR managers who participated in the study confirmed which of the 20 soft skills in the survey were important for young people entering the job market. Figure 5 presents the related results. The median and mean values represent the respondents' answers. We found that for HR managers, the least important soft skills are positive attitude and creativity, while the most important soft skills are time management, responsibility, and proactivity.

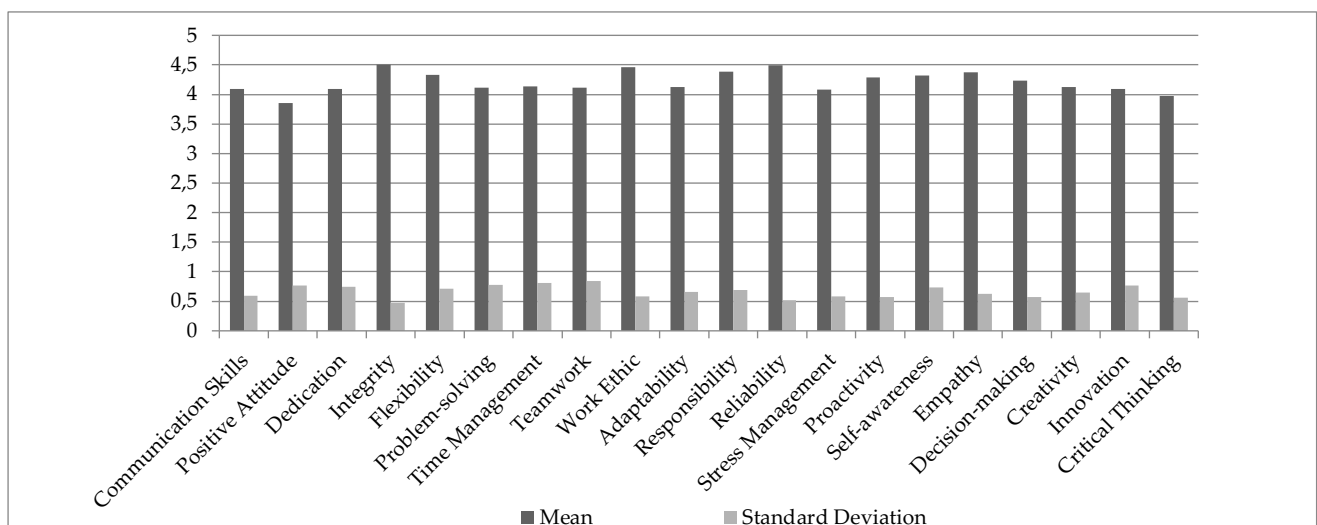


Figure 2. Soft skills in the sample – General

Sample 2: Human Resource (HR) Managers

In the second sample, we included 63 Human Resource (HR) Managers from various fields, with the companies operating in different sectors. Figure 3 shows that the oldest company in the sample was 43 years old, and the youngest company was less than one year old. The average age of the sample was 6.44; therefore, the sample mostly comprised companies less than 10 years old.

Figure 4 shows two companies with approximately 3,500 employees and 2,000 employees. However, the sample is dominated by companies with fewer than 500 employees. The average number of employees of the sample companies is 268. All companies believe that soft

The other soft skills important for young people are discipline, determination, respect, cooperation, honesty, hospitality, project management, data analytics, and management.

Table 2 presents HR managers' views on soft skills that help young people to be more competitive. The results revealed that the least important soft skill to increase young people's competitiveness is proactivity, followed by time management and creativity. Dedication and work ethic are important soft skills that help young people increase their competitiveness in the labor market in performing a certain job. Of the 63 companies in the sample, HR managers of only two (3.17%) found no mismatch between the soft skill level of new graduates preparing to enter the labor market and those expected from young people. All other managers (96.83%) believed that an evident mismatch required continuous work.

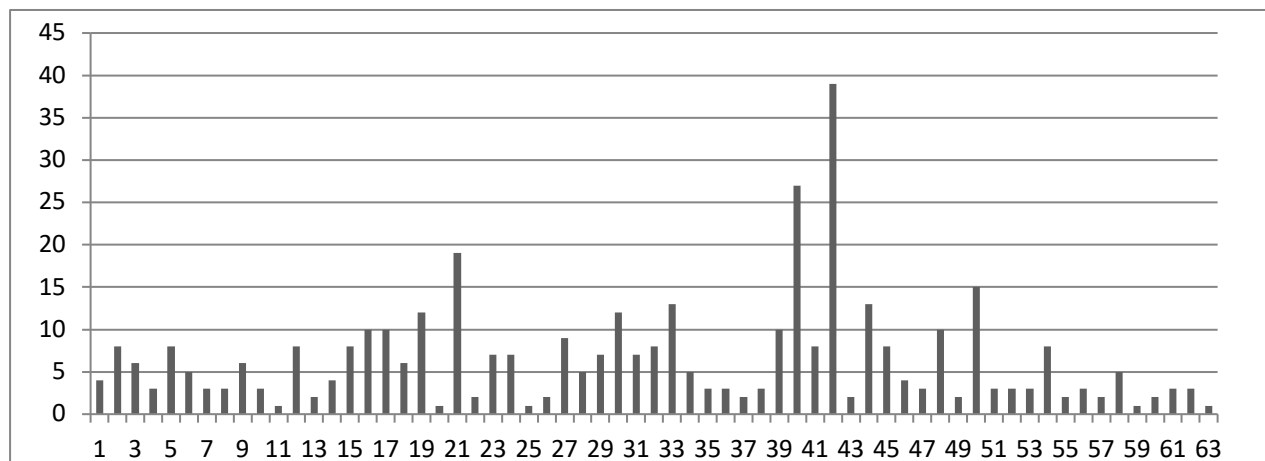


Figure 3. Age of the companies.

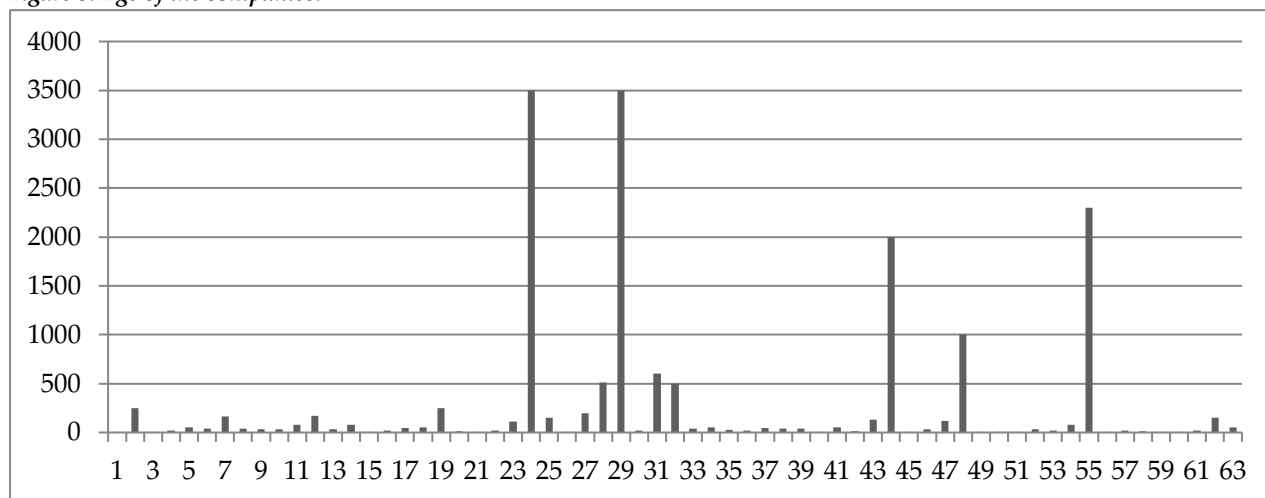


Figure 4. Number of employees

results indicate that HR managers believe that



Figure 5. Soft skills of young people that are important for HR managers

young graduates are still insufficiently prepared for the labor market, and that they should work on their soft skills.

In the research process, the managers were also asked, "Which soft skills do you want new graduates preparing to enter the labor market to have more of?" The answers are reported in Table 3. The results show that HR managers want students to have excellent adaptability and creativity when entering the labor market. Other desirable soft skills include problem-solving, teamwork, and work ethic. Moreover, the research

Table 2. Soft skills that help young people to be more competitive.

	Proactivity	Work Ethic	Dedication	Time Management	Creativity
N	63	63	63	63	63
	Valid	63	63	63	63
	Missing	0	0	0	0

Mean	9.0317	11.1270	11.2857	9.4444	10.6984
Median	9.0000	12.0000	10.0000	7.0000	11.0000

Table 3. Soft skills that new graduates preparing to enter the labor market should have more of

	Teamwork	Problem Solving	Creativity	Adaptability	Work Ethic
N	Valid 63	Valid 63	Valid 63	Valid 63	Valid 63
	Missing 0	Missing 0	Missing 0	Missing 0	Missing 0
	Mean 8.7937	Mean 9.5873	Mean 10.2063	Mean 10.5556	Mean 8.8095
	Median 7.0000	Median 10.0000	Median 10.0000	Median 10.0000	Median 8.0000

In addition, the study analyzed which soft skills are relatively weak or strong in young graduates preparing to enter the labor market; Table 4 presents the results. According to the HR managers, young people do not possess soft skills such as problem-solving, proactivity, and time management, but they have creativity and work ethic (the most common soft skills among young people).

Table 4. Soft skills that are relatively weak and strong in young graduates preparing to enter the labor market.

	Problem Solving	Proactivity	Creativity	Time Management	Work Ethic
N	Valid 63	Valid 63	Valid 63	Valid 63	Valid 63
	Missing 0	Missing 0	Missing 0	Missing 0	Missing 0
	Mean 8.1270	Mean 9.6190	Mean 10.8095	Mean 10.0000	Mean 10.4603
	Median 7.0000	Median 9.0000	Median 12.0000	Median 10.0000	Median 10.0000

Given that young people often lack proficiency in certain soft skills, the question arises as to how to improve their skill levels. Some ways to improve soft skills in young people are learning foreign languages, following the business world, and participating in more projects, training, internships, and volunteering. Considering that training in soft skills is possible, this study attempted to determine the most desirable areas to organize a soft-skills training curriculum (Table 5). Soft-skills training in the areas of creativity, time management, and self-awareness is highly desirable, according to 96.83% of the HR managers in the sample.

Table 5. Organizing training and education in soft skills.

	Proactivity	Creativity	Time Management	Self-awareness	Work Ethic
N	Valid 63	Valid 63	Valid 63	Valid 63	Valid 63
	Missing 0	Missing 0	Missing 0	Missing 0	Missing 0
	Mean 9.2857	Mean 12.1429	Mean 11.4603	Mean 10.0317	Mean 9.5397
	Median 8.0000	Median 14.0000	Median 12.0000	Median 10.0000	Median 10.0000

Table 6 shows the most important skills for young people to get a job from the manager’s point of view. Communication skills are the most prioritized, while positive attitudes and proactivity are important as well. Time management and adaptability are relatively less important. Thus, HR managers expect the following skills from young people when they start working: following the rules at the workplace, security of company information, professionalism, respect, collaboration, and adaptation.

Table 6. The most important soft skills for young people to get a job.

	Adaptability	Communication	Positive Attitude	Proactivity	Time Management
N	Valid 63	Valid 63	Valid 63	Valid 63	Valid 63
	Missing 0	Missing 0	Missing 0	Missing 0	Missing 0
	Mean 7.9683	Mean 10.6508	Mean 9.1905	Mean 8.7778	Mean 8.0476
	Median 8.0000	Median 12.0000	Median 9.0000	Median 6.0000	Median 1.0000

Comparison between Samples

In this section, we addressed the gap between reality (i.e., what qualities are possessed by the students) and expectations (i.e., what HR managers expect students [young people] to demonstrate as their soft skills). While the students explicitly showed a high average on the scale, such as soft skills, integrity, reliability, and work ethic, HR managers have slightly different expectations. Communication skills are extremely important for them and represent the most essential and valuable soft skills for young people in the labor market. Students with well-developed communication skills found employment the fastest. Second, creativity was found to be very

weak among the students, but it is highly valued by HR managers and must be improved. The third was problem-solving. Although not recorded in the Students sample as a soft skill, managers value this skill and would like students (new workers) to know how to solve problems. In addition to these three skills, students must have a positive attitude, developed adaptability, and dedication.

Examining the Difference Between the Groups

The follow-up analysis was divided into four stages according to the months when the analysis was conducted: October, December, February, and April. Each stage consisted of a control and an experimental group.

We investigated whether there was an increase in employment in each group. The respondents designated as the experimental group underwent a 40-hour training in soft skills, and the control group did not receive the training. The control group accounted for 48% of the respondents, while the experimental group accounted for 52%. Table 7 shows the employment trends in the control group. While the number of employed respondents was 6 in October, it was 1 each in December and February and 2 in April.

Table 7. Employment trend in the control group.

Month of analysis	Number of respondents who were employed	Percentage of new employees in the control group
October	+ 6	19.35%
December	+ 1	3.22%
February	+ 1	3.22%
April	+2	6.45%
Total	+10	32.24%

Table 8 shows the employment trends in the experimental group. While 10 respondents were employed in October, 6 were employed in December, followed by 1 in February and 2 in April.

Table 8. Employment trend in the experimental group.

Month of analysis	Number of respondents who were employed	Percentage of new employees in the experimental group
October	+ 10	30.30%
December	+ 6	18.18%
February	+ 1	3.03%

April	+ 2	6.06%
Total	+19	57.57%

Next, we examined whether a statistically significant difference was recorded between the results of the control and experimental groups. Based on the following tests, we determined whether soft skills positively impacted young graduates. Table 9 contains basic information on the compared samples.

Table 9. Results of the comparison of the samples.

	EmploymentCG	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
EmploymentEG	.00	.2389	.4283	.0402
	1.00	.1000	.3162	.1000

We analyzed whether statistically significant differences existed between the control and experimental groups (Table 10). The F-statistic of the test was 6.072, and the significance level was 0.015 (>0.005); therefore, it was concluded that equal variances were not assumed. The T-statistic was 1.289, the number of degrees of freedom was 12.134, and the p-value was 0.002 (<0.005). Therefore, a statistically significant difference was found in the recorded samples and between the control and experimental groups, which manifested through employment. Thus, we can infer from the above analysis that the experimental group had higher employment. Training in soft skills benefits young people by giving them an advantage in the labor market and improving their chances of getting hired.

Conclusion

Turkey, a developing and high middle-income country, has a high youth unemployment rate and a fragile labor market structure, which makes the unemployment rate more sensitive to extraordinary events such as crises and pandemics, compared to the world average. Today, recruitment specialists or HR managers consider core or soft skills, and not technical skills, in the hiring process, due to the rapidly changing emerging labor market (Murgor, 2017; Vasanthakumari, 2019). Sufficient soft skills positively affect employability, success, and creative output (Wtas and Wats, 2009). Therefore,

this study examines the impact of soft skills on youth employment using experimental methods of inquiry, and emphasizes upskilling young vocational school graduates' soft skills to facilitate their entry into the labor market and achieve sustained employment.

study has shown that soft-skills training in the areas of creativity, time management, and self-awareness is highly desirable. The soft skills most needed are communication, a positive attitude, and proactivity. Some other things that HR managers find significant and expect from young people in their initial workplace are workplace

Table 10. Results of the independent samples test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	p-value	t	df	p-value (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Standard Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Dfference	
									Lower	Upper
EmploymentEG	Equal Variances not Assumed	6.072	.015	1.289	12.134	.002	.13894	.10781	-.09568	.37355

We used a quantitative analysis method to determine sufficient and insufficient soft skills for young graduates based on the Students sample. Students predominantly excelled in time management, responsibility, and proactivity, while they scored lowest in positive attitude, critical thinking, and stress management. These results contribute to current knowledge by demonstrating that soft skills must be developed for young graduates.

We also used a qualitative analysis method to examine the HR managers sample regarding the soft skills of newly graduated youth entering the labor market. The soft skills for young people that HR managers find the most important are time management, responsibility, and proactivity. Other important soft skills are discipline, determination, respect, cooperation, honesty, hospitality, project management, data analytics, and management skills. Dedication is another soft skill that helps young people become more competitive. In addition, managers demand that young people exhibit good adaptability and creativity. According to them, young people have weak problem-solving, proactivity, and time management skills but strong creative skills.

Some ways to improve soft skills in young people are learning foreign languages, following the business world, participating in more projects and training, internships, and volunteering. This

rules, security of company information, professionalism, respect, collaboration, and adaptability. These results contribute to current knowledge by creating awareness among newly graduated young people preparing to enter the labor market.

We developed a curriculum that detected 14 soft skills based on samples using an informal education method with international collaboration. We divided the Students sample into two groups: control and experimental. We conducted a soft-skills training program for the experimental group and used experimental research methods to determine whether a difference existed between the control and experimental groups regarding employment rates. The results confirmed that developing soft skills for young graduates positively affects hiring and youth employment. Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by emphasizing the relationship between the youth unemployment rate and soft skills.

Based on our findings, we recommend designing and applying training curricula to develop soft skills for young graduates in public institutions and companies. We also propose that practical lessons, which develop young undergraduate and vocational school students' soft skills, be added to the university curriculum and taught by specialists. In addition, team-based soft-skills projects in which students in

undergraduate/vocational schools participate both nationally and internationally should be undertaken. The improvement in skill and productivity will increase hiring and youth employment. Additionally, HR departments should design and implement soft-skills training programs for workers in public institutions or companies. All these measures will positively impact employment sustainability.

This study has a few limitations. First, our student sample was affiliated with a single institution to obtain a homogeneous sample for the results to be more consistent. Another limitation is that both samples are from Turkey. Future studies can consider samples from other countries or different institutions for an in-depth examination of the impact of soft skills on the labor market.

Glossary

Soft skill: A non-technical skill that describes how individuals work and interact with others.

Hard skill: A skill learned through education or hands-on experience. It is also known as technical skill.

Youth employment: Employment of individuals in the 15–24 age range.

Youth unemployment: Unemployment of individuals in the 15–24 age range.

Recruitment process: The process of actively seeking out, finding, and hiring candidates for a specific position or job.

Recruitment specialist: An individual who screens and interviews job applicants and matches candidates to suitable positions.

Labor market: A market where labor supply and labor demand meet.

HR Managers: Professionals who recruit, interview, and hire new staff in organizations.

Communication: The ability to clearly and effectively converse with others, set expectations, and collaborate on projects.

Positive attitude: The skill of being optimistic about situations, interactions, and oneself.

Dedication: The quality of being dedicated or committed to a task or purpose.

Integrity: The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles.

Flexibility: The willingness to change or compromise.

Problem-solving: The skill of finding solutions to difficult or complex issues.

Time management: The skill of using time effectively or productively, especially at work.

Teamwork: The skill of working effectively and efficiently within a group.

Work ethic: The skill of approaching work in an ethical way.

Adaptability: The skill of being able to adjust to new conditions.

Responsibility: The skill of having a duty to deal with something or of having control over someone.

Reliability: The skill of being trustworthy or performing consistently well.

Stress management: The skill of coping with stress effectively.

Proactivity: The skill of taking initiative and anticipating future problems or needs.

Self-awareness: The skill of knowing one's own character and feelings.

Empathy: The skill of understanding and sharing the feelings of another.

Decision-making: The skill of making important decisions effectively.

Creativity: The skill of using imagination or original ideas to create something.

Innovation: The skill of producing a new method, idea, product, etc.

Critical thinking: The skill of objective analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a judgment.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the recruiters and human resources managers who shared their valuable opinions about our study, the graduates of the Vocational School of Social Sciences who were part of the study sample, and Monica Sujka, Onur Sarıoğlu, Meriç Tahan, Pınar Gökpinar, Müjde Akgül, Şehnaz Yılmaz, Nuri Babacan who supported the training process. We also thank Mark Causon for guiding us with his experience.

Funding

This work was supported by the European Commission [grant number 2022-1-TR01-KA220-YOU-000087078].

References

- Crawford, P., Dalton, R. (2016). Providing built environment students with the necessary skills for employment: Finding the required soft skills, *Curr. Urban Stud.* 04 (2016) 97–123. <https://doi.org/10.4236/cus.2016.41008>.
- Dixon, J., Belnap, C., Albrecht, C., Lee, K. (2010). The importance of soft skills, *Corp. Fin. Rev.* 14 (2010) 35–38.
- Emanuel, F., Ricchiardi, P., Sanseverino, D., Ghislieri, C. (2021). Make soft skills stronger? An online enhancement platform for higher education, *Int. J. Educ. Res. Open.* 2 (2021) 100096. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2021.100096>.
- Evenson, R. (1999). Soft skills, hard sell techniques, *Mak. Educ. Career Connect.* 74 (1999) 29–31.
- Fernandes, P.R.S., Jardim, J., Lopes, M.C.S. (2021). The soft skills of special education teachers: Evidence from the literature, *Educ. Sci.* 11 (2021) 9. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11030125>.
- Geffel, M., Park, S. (2016). *Hard & Soft Skills Booklet*. Jefferson Community College, New York, 192.188.202.54/student-life/documents/Hard_and_Soft_Skills_Booklet.pdf
- Groh, M., Krishnan, N., McKenzie, D., Vishwanath, T. (2016). The impact of soft skills training on female youth employment: Evidence from a randomized experiment in Jordan, *IZA J. Labor Develop.* 5 (2016) 9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40175-016-0055-9>.
- Groh, M., Krishnan, N., McKenzie, D., Vishwanath, T. (2012). Soft skills or hard cash? The impact of training and wage subsidy programs on female youth employment in Jordan. Impact Evaluation Series, no. IE 62, Policy Research Working Paper number WPS 6141, World Bank Group, 2012. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/654491468271825136/Soft-skills-or-hard-cash-the-impact-of-training-and-wage-subsidy-programs-on-female-youth-employment-in-Jordan>.
- Heckman, J.J. and Kautz, T. (2012). Hard evidence on soft skills, *Lab. Econ.* 19 (2012) 451–464. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2012.05.014>.
- Ibourk, A. and Aynaoui, K. El. (2023). Career trajectories of higher education graduates: Impact of soft skills, *Economies.* 11 (2023) 198. <https://doi.org/10.3390/economies11070198>.
- International Labour Organization. (2024). *World Economic and Social Outlook Trends 2024*, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/dgreports/inst/documents/publication/wcms_908142.pdf.
- James, R.F. and James, M.L. (2004). *Teaching career and technical skills in a “mini”*, *Bus. World, Business Education Forum.* 59 (2004) 39–41.
- Klaus, P. (2010). Communication breakdown, *Calif. Job J.* 28 (2010) 1–9.
- Kolesnik, K., Oliinyk, N., Komarivska, N., Kazmirchuk, N. and Imber, V. (2023). Future-teacher soft skills development in the context of Ukraine’s integration into the European higher education Area, *Int. J. Learn. Teach. Educ. Res.* 22 (2023) 413–431. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.22.2.23>.
- Mansura, N., Kashfia, N. (2018). Soft skills for sustainable employment: Does it really matter?, *IJMEI.* 4 (2018) 1835–1837. <https://doi.org/10.31142/ijmei/v4i7.03>.
- Mishra, K. (2014). Employability skills that recruiters demand, *IUP J. Soft Skills.* 8 (2014) 50–55.
- Moss, P., Tilly, C. (1996). “Soft” skills and race: An investigation of black men’s employment problems, *Work Occupations.* 23 (1996) 252–276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888496023003002>.
- Murgor, T.K. (2017). Soft skills preparation as panacea for self-employment for TVET technician graduates in Kenya, *Int. J. Vocat. Tech. Educ. Res.* 3 (2017) 18–34.
- Nickson, D., Warhurst, C., Commander, J., Hurrell, S.A., and Cullen, A.M. (2012). Soft skills and employability: Evidence from UK retail, *Econ. Ind. Democr.* 33 (2012) 65–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X11427589>.
- Ramos-Monge, E., Fox, P., Garcia-Piquer, A. (2023). Addressing soft skill gaps in the digital employment market: The case of Spanish students in a technology-based university,

- Educ. Train.* 65 (2023) 923–938. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-04-2023-0165>.
- Robles, M.M. (2012). Executive perceptions of the top 10 soft skills needed in today's workplace, *Bus. Commun. Q.* 75 (2012) 453–465. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1080569912460400>.
- Sebastião, L., Tirapicos, F., Payan-Carreira, R., Rebelo, H. (2023). Skill profiles for employability: (Mis)understandings between higher education institutions and employers, *Educ. Sci.* 13 (2023) 905. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13090905>.
- Sharma, M. (2018). How important are soft skills from the recruiter's perspective, *IUP J. Soft Skills.* 3 (2018) 19–28.
- Sheikh, R.A., Abdalkrim, G.M., Shehawy, Y.M. (2023). Assessing the impact of business simulation as a teaching method for developing 21st century future skills, *J. Int. Educ. Bus.* 16 (2023) 351–370. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIEB-11-2022-0085>.
- Singh, A., Jaykumar, P. (2019). On the road to consensus: Key soft skills required for youth employment in the service sector, *Worldwide Hosp. Tourism Themes.* 11 (2019) 10–24. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-10-2018-0066>.
- Sławińska, K., Villani, C.S. (2014). Gaining and strengthening “soft skills” for employment, *Sieć Badawcza Łukasiewicz.* 3 (2014) 44–53.
- Vasanthakumari, S. (2019). Soft skills and its application in work place, *World J. Adv. Res. Rev.* 03 (2019) 066–072. <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2019.3.2.0057>.
- Ward, V.G., Riddle, D.I. (2014). *Weaving soft skills development into everyday employment services in Canada,* 2014. <http://www.employmentreadiness.info/home>.
- Wats, R.K. and Wats, M. (2009). Developing soft skills in students, *Int. J. Learn.* 15 (2009) 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9494/CGP/v15i12/46032>.
- World Bank, (2006). *The Preparing Youth for 21st Century Jobs: Entra 21 Across Latin America and the Caribbean,* 2006. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/924811468016243951/preparing-youth-for-21st-century-jobs-entra-21-across-latin-america-and-the-caribbean>.
- World Economic Forum. (2023). *The Future of Jobs Report 2023,* 2023. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/the-future-of-jobs-report-2023/digest/>.