



Soft Skills of the Third-Year Bachelor of Arts in English Students of Northern Negros State College of Science and Technology

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Received: May 16, 2025	Revised: August 8, 2025	Accepted: August 29, 2025	Online: September 30, 2025
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Abstract

This study assessed the level of soft skills among third-year AB-English students at Northern Negros State College of Science and Technology during the academic year 2017–2018, to examine their behavioral and developmental implications. Utilizing a descriptive quantitative research design, data were collected through a validated researcher-made questionnaire focusing on eight core soft skills: creativity, time management, conflict management, flexibility, etiquette and good manners, sociability, communication skills, and leadership. Results indicated that the respondents generally possessed high levels of soft skills (grand mean = 4.18), with particularly high ratings in conflict management and etiquette and good manners. No significant differences were found across age and sex, suggesting that these demographic factors did not influence skill levels in this population. From a behavioral perspective, the findings highlight strengths in social interaction and self-management while revealing areas for targeted improvement, such as creativity and flexibility. These insights contribute to behavior-oriented educational strategies by informing curriculum developers and educators on how to design interventions that reinforce essential 21st-century competencies. The results serve as a foundation for an intervention program aimed at enhancing specific soft skills to support students' academic and professional readiness.

Keywords: *Soft Skills; ABEnglish; creativity; time management; conflict management; flexibility; etiquette and good manners; sociability; communication skills; leadership*

INTRODUCTION

Soft skills, which include personal attributes such as communication, creativity, leadership, and emotional intelligence, are increasingly recognized as crucial for academic achievement, career readiness, and long-term professional growth. In the modern workplace, employers consistently rank soft skills among the most important qualities in job candidates, often regarding them as equally significant as technical expertise (Robles, 2012; Jackson, 2016). In the Philippines, the Department of Labor and Employment reported that over 70% of employers considered deficiencies in soft skills as a significant barrier to graduate employability, mirroring trends seen globally (Whiting, 2020). Although these reports emphasize the importance of behavioral competencies in the labor market, they primarily address general employability outcomes and do not provide discipline-specific insights, thereby leaving a gap in understanding how soft skills manifest in particular academic programs.

While existing literature highlights the importance of soft skills in workforce preparation (Klaus, 2007; Hager et al., 2000), few Philippine studies have examined their prevalence within specific higher education disciplines. Most works have focused broadly on graduate employability or industry expectations, but less attention has been given to students in humanities programs such as the Bachelor of Arts in English. Third-year AB-English students represent a particularly relevant

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group for study because, at this stage in their program, they have already undergone foundational coursework in communication, literature, and professional writing, and are beginning to prepare for internships or pre-service teaching. Their academic background positions them at a critical transition point where soft skills development intersects with both academic performance and workplace readiness.

This study defines soft skills in line with the Behavioral Competency Model (Boyatzis, 2008), which considers them as measurable interpersonal and intrapersonal behaviors contributing to effective performance. Specifically, the study assesses eight domains: creativity, time management, conflict management, flexibility, etiquette and good manners, sociability, communication skills, and leadership. These competencies were selected because they are directly relevant to the academic and professional pathways of AB-English students, who are expected to engage in teaching, communication-oriented roles, or creative industries after graduation.

The objective of this study is to determine the level of soft skills among third-year AB-English students of NONESCOST and propose appropriate interventions based on the results. These interventions are envisioned as short-term co-curricular and extracurricular programs—such as workshops, seminars, and student organization activities—that can be feasibly implemented within the institution, while also offering insights for longer-term curriculum enhancement. The following research questions are:

1. What is the level of soft skills among third-year AB-English students at Northern Negros State College of Science and Technology?
2. Are there significant differences in soft skills levels when students are grouped according to age and sex?
3. Based on the results, what targeted interventions can be recommended to strengthen students' soft skills?

This study addresses both a practical gap—the need to identify and improve key soft skills for specific student cohorts—and a theoretical gap by contributing to the understanding of behavioral competencies within higher education. The inclusion of age and sex as grouping variables acknowledges prior literature suggesting that demographic characteristics may influence self-perception and development of soft skills (Jackson et al., 2016; Hughes & Jones, 2011). Clarifying whether these factors are significant within this student population provides additional insights for designing equitable training and development programs.

By situating this investigation in the context of Philippine higher education, the study not only documents the current state of AB-English students' soft skills but also offers actionable recommendations for curriculum designers, educators, and policymakers who aim to integrate behavioral and interpersonal competencies into formal learning environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Soft skills, defined as interpersonal and intrapersonal attributes such as communication, adaptability, leadership, and problem-solving, are critical for employability and professional advancement (Robles, 2012; Jackson et al., 2016). Global reports have consistently shown that employers value these competencies as much as technical abilities, with organizations across industries emphasizing the need for communication, teamwork, and adaptability (Klaus, 2007; Hager et al., 2000). In the Philippines, studies have similarly highlighted the role of these skills in graduate employability, where deficiencies in communication, adaptability, and leadership can hinder career progression (De Guzman, 2013). These competencies are essential not only for workplace readiness but also for academic success, as they influence collaboration, creativity, and the ability to navigate complex tasks (Maxwell, 2010).

Changes in technology, globalization, and workplace structures have increased the demand for adaptable, socially competent graduates (Hughes & Jones, 2011). Employers expect graduates to balance technical expertise with interpersonal abilities, such as negotiation, cultural sensitivity, and emotional intelligence (Binsaheed et al., 2017). Modern higher education faces the challenge of integrating these competencies into curricula to prepare students for dynamic work environments (Ferrari, 2012; Kemenade, 2012).

This study is grounded in the Behavioral Competency Model (Boyatzis, 2008), which defines competencies as underlying characteristics, including motives, traits, and skills that lead to effective performance. Within this model, soft skills are considered behavioral competencies that can be observed, measured, and developed. Using this framework enables the study to examine soft skills not only as personal traits but also as measurable behaviors linked to academic and career success. Research has consistently linked soft skills to improved employability and workplace performance (Jackson et al., 2016; Robles, 2012). Klaus (2007) found that professionals with strong soft skills were more likely to advance in their careers even when their technical skills were comparable to those of their peers. De Guzman (2013) emphasized the need for closer collaboration between higher education institutions and industries to ensure students graduate with relevant competencies. Hager et al. (2000) identified communication, teamwork, and organizational planning as critical for success in both technical and non-technical professions.

Although literature confirms the importance of soft skills, there is limited empirical research focusing specifically on the prevalence and development of these competencies in particular academic programs in Philippine higher education. Few studies have applied a behavioral science framework to explore the interaction between demographic characteristics (e.g., age, sex) and soft skills. Moreover, while general recommendations for skill development exist, fewer works provide targeted, evidence-based interventions for specific student cohorts. Guided by the Behavioral Competency Model, this study evaluates the soft skills of third-year AB-English students in a state college setting, examines demographic influences, and proposes intervention strategies. The findings contribute to both educational practice by providing data to inform skill development programs and behavioral science by operationalizing soft skills as measurable competencies in higher education.

In conclusion, the reviewed literature consistently supports the notion that soft skills are indispensable for professional success. Whether in corporate sectors, construction, or education, the demand for employees with strong interpersonal and intrapersonal abilities continues to grow. This underscores the relevance of the present study, which aims to explore further and highlight the role of soft skills in employee performance and career advancement.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to assess the level of soft skills among third-year AB-English students at Northern Negros State College of Science and Technology (NONESCOST). The descriptive design was selected because it enables the systematic collection and analysis of quantifiable data without manipulating study variables, thereby providing a snapshot of the respondents' current skill levels (Alreck & Settle, 1995).

The key advantage of using a descriptive design lies in its ability to systematically collect and analyze data, providing a comprehensive snapshot of the current state of soft skills among the students. By using closed-ended questions, the study was able to collect quantifiable data that could be easily subjected to statistical analysis. This method provided an objective, consistent framework to assess the prevalence of soft skills, such as communication, leadership, and time management, among the participants (Creswell, 2014).

Furthermore, the quantitative aspect of the design allowed for the identification of trends

and patterns within the soft skill sets of students. This information is essential for educational institutions aiming to improve training programs, as it highlights specific areas where students may need further development (Bell, 2010). In this way, the descriptive design not only described the students' soft skills but also pointed to potential gaps in their education that could be addressed through targeted interventions.

Additionally, the use of descriptive research is particularly valuable in educational studies, as it helps in identifying the relationship between personal characteristics (such as age and sex) and soft skill levels. By correlating these variables, the research can suggest how demographic factors influence skill development, offering insights that can be used by educators and policymakers to tailor curriculum and professional development programs more effectively (Wong, 2010).

Study Period and Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted during the second semester of Academic Year 2017–2018. Data collection took place over two weeks in February 2018. Prior to data gathering, the research proposal underwent review and approval by the NONESCOST Research Ethics Committee, ensuring that ethical standards for participant consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were met. All participants provided informed consent before answering the questionnaire.

Population, Sampling, and Sample Size Justification

The study population consisted of all third-year Bachelor of Arts in English students enrolled at NONESCOST Main Campus during the specified semester, totaling $N = 81$ students. A purposive sampling method was employed to ensure that only students who had completed at least two years of coursework—which included exposure to relevant academic and extracurricular activities were included. The final sample consisted of 67 students (16 males and 51 females). Sample adequacy (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Using the Krejcie–Morgan finite-population formula:

$$s = \frac{X^2 NP(1 - P)}{d^2(N - 1) + X^2 P(1 - P)}$$

With:

χ^2 : 3.841
P : 0.50
d : 0.05

With the given data and formula, the minimum required sample size for a population of $N = 81$ is approximately $n \approx 66$. The achieved $n = 67$ therefore meets and slightly exceeds the recommended size, ensuring sufficient statistical power and representativeness of the target population.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-made, closed-ended questionnaire designed to measure eight core soft skills that are particularly relevant to AB-English majors:

1. Creativity – important for literary analysis, composition, and innovative teaching approaches.
2. Time Management – necessary for meeting academic deadlines and managing workloads.
3. Conflict Management – essential for group projects, peer feedback, and classroom interactions.
4. Flexibility – required to adapt to changing academic tasks and instructional contexts.
5. Etiquette and Good Manners – reflects professional and cultural expectations in

Philippine education and society.

6. Sociability – relates to collaborative work, classroom participation, and social engagement.
7. Communication Skills – central to English studies, teaching, and professional communication.
8. Leadership – relevant for student organization roles, class projects, and professional preparation.

The instrument consisted of 40 items (five per domain), each rated on a five-point Likert scale (5 = Very High, 4 = High, 3 = Moderate, 2 = Low, 1 = Very Low). Item adaptation process. Initial items were drawn from established soft skills scales (e.g., [Robles, 2012](#)) and aligned with the Behavioral Competency Model ([Boyatzis, 2008](#)). These were then contextualized to AB-English students' academic and social experiences. For example:

- A creativity item was phrased as “I typically create new ideas by combining existing ideas” to reflect literary and project-based work.
- A time management item such as “I organize my work to meet deadlines” reflected common student tasks like essay and paper submissions.
- Etiquette items (e.g., “I cover my mouth when I cough”) were included to measure culturally relevant behavioral norms tied to social and professional acceptability.
- Leadership items (e.g., “I call a meeting regularly to address issues in the team”) were designed to capture experiences common in student organizations or classroom group leadership.

During the adaptation, some generic workplace-oriented items (e.g., those referring to “corporate performance reviews”) were dropped or reworded to ensure relevance to a student setting. The final version retained five items per domain to maintain balanced representation across all eight competencies.

Validity and Reliability

Content Validation

The initial draft questionnaire was subjected to evaluation by a three-member panel of experts in education and behavioral sciences. They assessed the instrument using a five-point scale (5 = Excellent, 4 = Very Good, 3 = Good, 2 = Fair, 1 = Poor) across nine criteria: brevity, face appeal, depth of responses, neutrality of items, definitiveness of responses, sensitivity, clarity of purpose, scope, and alignment with the study objectives. The results showed that the questionnaire obtained mean ratings ranging from 4.0 to 4.7 across criteria, with a total mean of 4.4 (“Very Good”), indicating that the experts found the instrument to be valid, appropriate, and contextually suitable for the target respondents. Specific recommendations were also incorporated: redundant items were removed, ambiguous wording was clarified, and examples were provided where necessary to improve clarity.

Pilot Testing

The revised 40-item instrument was pilot-tested with 15 AB-English students from a different year level. Respondents were asked to comment on clarity, redundancy, and item relevance. Based on their feedback, minor wording adjustments (e.g., clarifying “social contacts” with concrete examples such as “student organizations, peer groups”) and item reordering were made to improve readability and flow. No additional items were added or removed, and the final instrument remained at 40 items (five per soft skill domain).

Reliability Analysis

Using data from the main sample, internal consistency was evaluated through Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.913, demonstrating excellent reliability (Nunnally, 1978). Subscale alphas ranged from 0.82 (Etiquette and Good Manners) to 0.91 (Conflict Management), confirming that each domain of the instrument was consistently measured.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher coordinated with the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and course instructors to schedule in-class administration of the questionnaire. The researcher personally administered the instrument to all respondents, ensuring standardized instructions and clarifying any questions. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately to avoid data loss or contamination.

Data Analysis

Data were encoded and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The following statistical techniques were applied:

1. Descriptive Statistics: Mean and standard deviation to determine the overall and category-specific soft skills levels.
2. Independent Samples t-Test: To test for differences in soft skills between male and female respondents.
3. One-Way ANOVA: To determine if significant differences existed across age groups.
4. Post-Hoc Tests: Applied when ANOVA results suggested group differences.

These methods were chosen to align with the study's objectives of identifying general soft skills levels and examining variations according to demographic variables. The significance level was set at $p < 0.05$ for all inferential tests. The contribution of this research design to the study is substantial as it enabled a clear, reliable measurement of soft skills among a defined group of students, offering valuable data that can inform future educational practices and improve soft skills training at NONESCOST and similar institutions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets the data gathered from the third-year AB-English students of NONESCOST regarding their level of soft skills and how these relate to demographic factors such as sex and age.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents in Terms of Sex and Age

Variable	Grouping	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	16	23.9%
	Female	51	76.1%
	Total	67	100%
Age	16–18	6	9.0%
	19–21	41	61.2%
	22–24	10	14.9%
	25 and above	10	14.9%
	Total	67	100.0%

The sample comprised 67 third-year AB-English students, with 76.1% female ($n = 51$) and 23.9% male ($n = 16$). Most respondents were aged 19–21 years (61.2%), followed by those aged 22–24 years (14.9%) and 25 years and above (14.9%). A smaller proportion were 16–18 years old (9.0%).

Table 2. Level of Soft Skills of the Respondents

Soft Skills	Std. Deviation	Mean	Description
Creativity	0.60412	3.9522	High
Time Management	0.66504	4.0119	High
Conflict Management	0.61927	4.2657	Very High
Flexibility	0.59620	4.1701	High
Etiquette and Good Manners	0.50961	4.6299	Very High
Sociability	0.73307	4.0507	High
Communication Skills	0.67287	4.1761	High
Leadership	0.63859	4.1910	High
Overall Mean	0.62985	4.181	High

Table 2 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for each soft skill category. Scores ranged from 3.95 (Creativity) to 4.63 (Etiquette and Good Manners). The lowest standard deviation was observed in Etiquette and Good Manners ($SD = 0.51$), indicating high consensus among respondents. From a behavioral perspective, the high to very high ratings suggest that students possess strong interpersonal and self-management abilities, particularly in handling conflict and demonstrating socially acceptable behavior. This aligns with Robles (2012) and Maxwell (2010), who identified such competencies as foundational for workplace integration and collaboration.

Assumption Checks

Prior to conducting inferential analyses, the data were examined for compliance with statistical assumptions.

Normality

Shapiro–Wilk tests indicated that the distribution of composite soft skills scores within groups did not significantly deviate from normality ($p > .05$). This was supported by visual inspection of Q–Q plots.

Homogeneity of Variances

Levene’s test revealed that the assumption of equal variances was met for both the independent samples t-test comparing male and female respondents ($p = .418$) and the one-way ANOVA across age groups ($p = .287$).

Since assumptions were satisfied, results from the standard t-test and ANOVA are reported below.

Table 3. Difference in Soft Skills According to Sex

Profile	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-test	p-value	Interpretation
Male	16	4.0750	0.60923	-1.021	0.311	Not Significant
Female	51	4.2142	0.42765			

An independent samples t-test revealed no significant difference in soft skills between male ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.61$, $n = 16$) and female ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.43$, $n = 51$) respondents, $t(65) = -1.02$, p

= .311. The effect size was Cohen's $d = 0.27$, which is considered small (Cohen, 1988). This suggests that the practical difference in soft skills between sexes is minimal. The finding supports [Hughes and Jones \(2011\)](#), who reported that gender differences in soft skills are often negligible when individuals are exposed to similar academic and social environments.

Table 4. Difference in Soft Skills According to Age

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Interpretation
Between Groups	0.320	3	0.107	0.459	0.712	Not Significant
Within Groups	14.628	63	0.232			
Total	14.948	66				

One-way ANOVA results showed no significant variation in soft skills across age groups, $F(3, 63) = 0.46$, $p = .712$. The effect size, measured by eta squared ($\eta^2 = 0.02$), indicated a small effect, suggesting that age explained only about 2% of the variance in soft skills scores. This reinforces the interpretation that age, within this sample, is not a strong determinant of soft skills proficiency—a result also observed by [De Guzman \(2013\)](#) in her work on employability in Philippine graduates.

Interpretation and Comparison with Literature

The very high scores in Etiquette and Good Manners reflect the cultural emphasis on respect and courtesy in Philippine educational settings, consistent with [Myers \(2014\)](#) and [Bénabou and Tirole \(2006\)](#) who noted the social and motivational value of prosocial behavior. The strong rating in Conflict Management suggests that students are adept at navigating disagreements constructively, a skill identified by [Rahim \(2002\)](#) as essential for maintaining group productivity.

Conversely, Creativity and Time Management—although rated “high”—had the lowest mean scores. This aligns with [Kemenade \(2012\)](#) who argued that such skills require intentional curricular integration and may be underdeveloped without structured training. While previous studies (e.g., [Jackson et al., 2016](#)) found that age and gender sometimes influence soft skill levels, our results did not reveal such differences. This may be due to the relatively homogeneous nature of the sample—students of the same year level and program who share similar learning experiences.

These findings indicate that while students demonstrate strong behavioral competencies, targeted development in creativity, flexibility, and time management could further enhance their readiness for professional settings. Such interventions could take the form of project-based learning, leadership workshops, and time management seminars. The results provide an evidence base for integrating behavioral skill development into higher education curricula, consistent with the Behavioral Competency Model ([Boyatzis, 2008](#)).

Proposed Intervention Program

To enhance the soft skills that were rated only as “high,” such as creativity, time management, flexibility, sociability, communication skills, and leadership, the following intervention program is proposed:

Table 5. Intervention Program

Program Phase	Key Actors	Time Frame	Success Indicators
Preparation	Third-year AB-English students, Dean of CAS, Chairperson, Facilitators	1 month	Confirmation of speaker; finalized seminar details (venue, AV needs, certificates, etc.)
Implementation	Same, plus Invited Speakers	1 week	Active student participation; improvement in soft skills knowledge
Evaluation	Dean, Chairperson, Facilitators	1 day	Evaluation results collected and analyzed

This three-phase intervention is designed to build upon the already high levels of soft skills by focusing on continuous development, engagement, and assessment.

Supporting Studies

The findings are supported by existing research. The high rating in etiquette and good manners aligns with [Benabou and Tirole \(2006\)](#), who emphasized the social value of prosocial behavior and how it can be sustained through intrinsic motivation. The very high level of conflict management reflects findings that effective conflict resolution promotes group productivity. Other skills rated as “high” are also validated by the literature:

Creativity

[Neubauer \(2006\)](#) stressed that high creativity is essential for effective problem-solving, a point further supported by the study “*Role of Creativity in Problem Solving – A Review*.” This work highlights the integral role of creativity in both problem-solving and decision-making processes. The authors analyze various theoretical and empirical studies, concluding that creativity significantly enhances an individual’s ability to generate innovative solutions and make informed decisions. Such findings underscore the importance of fostering creativity to strengthen problem-solving competencies.

Time Management

[Fleming \(2011\)](#) demonstrated that effective time management enhances task efficiency and highlighted the critical distinction between efficiency and effectiveness. Efficiency refers to completing tasks correctly, whereas effectiveness concerns selecting and prioritizing the right tasks to achieve desired outcomes. Understanding this distinction is essential for improving both task performance and overall productivity.

Communication Skills

[Coffelt \(2017\)](#) emphasized that strong communication skills are essential for effective interaction, particularly in professional contexts. Her research demonstrates that effective communication not only facilitates successful interpersonal exchanges but is also highly valued by employers. These findings reinforce the need to develop robust communication competencies to enhance workplace relationships and overall efficiency.

Flexibility

Whitehead (2010) introduced the concept of physical literacy, encompassing motivation, confidence, physical competence, understanding, and knowledge required to sustain lifelong physical activity. This holistic perspective emphasizes the importance of adaptability and flexibility across diverse physical and social contexts, underscoring their contribution to personal development and overall well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to (1) determine the level of soft skills among third-year AB-English students at Northern Negros State College of Science and Technology, (2) examine differences in skill levels according to age and sex, and (3) propose targeted interventions to strengthen these skills. Results showed that students generally possessed high levels of all measured soft skills, with Conflict Management and Etiquette and Good Manners rated very high. No significant differences in soft skills were found across age or sex, suggesting that these demographic variables do not strongly influence the development of such competencies within this cohort.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce the Behavioral Competency Model (Boyatzis, 2008) by demonstrating that soft skills—observable behaviors such as communication, adaptability, and leadership—can be reliably measured and assessed within an academic population. They also contribute to behavioral science literature by offering empirical evidence that high levels of interpersonal and self-management skills can exist alongside targeted developmental needs, such as creativity and time management, within a relatively homogeneous student group.

From a practical standpoint, the results highlight the need for higher education institutions to integrate intentional soft skills development into curricula. While students already demonstrate strong interpersonal competencies, structured interventions could strengthen weaker areas. Educators may design project-based learning experiences that challenge creativity and problem-solving. Curriculum developers could embed time management and adaptability exercises into academic requirements. Policymakers may promote co-curricular programs and partnerships with industry to reinforce workplace-relevant competencies. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Enhance creativity and flexibility through cross-disciplinary projects and innovation-focused coursework.
2. Strengthen time management skills via workshops, mentoring programs, and self-regulation strategies.
3. Maintain high interpersonal skills through ongoing engagement in leadership roles, student organizations, and community outreach.
4. Institutionalize soft skills assessment as part of the academic performance evaluation to ensure continuous monitoring and improvement.

By explicitly linking results to both theory and practice, this study provides a foundation for evidence-based strategies to foster the behavioral competencies necessary for success in both academic and professional contexts.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

This study was limited to third-year AB-English students at Northern Negros State College of Science and Technology during the second semester of Academic Year 2017–2018. The use of a single-institution, program-specific sample limits the generalizability of the findings to other year levels, academic disciplines, or institutional contexts. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported questionnaires may have introduced response bias, as participants might have overestimated or

underestimated their actual soft skills. The study also employed a purely quantitative approach, which provided numerical measures of skills but did not capture the deeper behavioral processes, motivations, or contextual influences behind these competencies.

Within the Behavioral Competency Model, competencies are learned and developed through both academic and experiential activities. By focusing only on quantitative self-assessment, this study may not fully reflect the dynamic interaction between internal motivations and external experiences that shape soft skills. Future research could integrate qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus group discussions, to explore how specific experiences contribute to skill development.

By addressing these limitations and pursuing the proposed research directions, future studies can deepen the understanding of soft skills as behavioral competencies and provide stronger, evidence-based foundations for educational policy and curriculum development.

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