


Do Soft Skills Affect the Employability of Graduates? Insights from the Labor Market of Bangladesh



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Abstract: University education primarily emphasizes the instruction of advanced skills to learners. Students learn how to become successful in their careers but do not develop soft skills. Without soft skills, any university graduate confronts significant challenges in their professional lives. The purpose of this study was to investigate how higher education institutions (HEIs) develop soft skills to improve graduate employability. The study employed qualitative methodologies. Data were gathered from secondary sources. This study ranks several soft skills based on their usefulness in various jobs, including communication, leadership, decision-making, teamwork, and problem-solving. The study identifies a gap between the job market expectation and higher education outcomes. The findings show that students require stronger client orientation, communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and work ethic abilities. The researcher described the significance of higher education institutions in developing soft skills, as well as their own personal attempts to obtain them. Students acquired soft skills through efforts such as joining organizations and groups, adopting leadership positions, reading self-development books, viewing films, and attending soft skills workshops. University students should learn soft skills before graduating. This study analyzes the strategies used by students to gain soft skills while pursuing higher education.

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Keywords: soft skill; student engagement; skill gap; higher education; graduate students; Bangladesh.

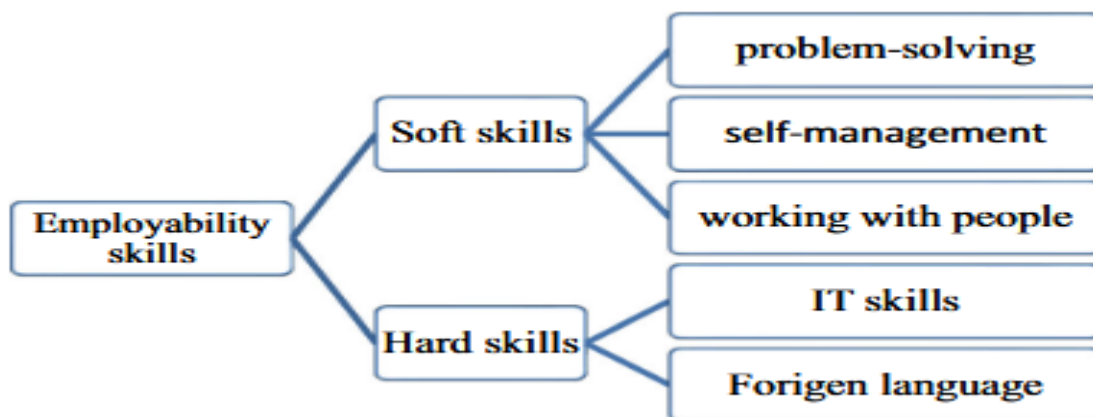
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Introduction

The job market for recent graduates in Bangladesh is currently becoming more competitive. Strong job demand, skill gaps, and a lack of practical experience have now limited career opportunities for recently educated individuals in Bangladesh. Currently, Bangladesh's education system is failing to recognize the future of work needs, which necessitate significant curriculum modifications and quality adjustments in teaching and learning techniques in order to remain competitive (Islam 2019). Learning objectives should seek to help students improve their professional identities and competencies. In today's competitive world, traditional graduation programs in Bangladesh must be revised and modernized. Universities cannot just convey information through textbooks; they must also provide students with job-oriented courses and skill-based training. Professor Abdul Mannan claims that the nation's labor market is becoming skill-driven. He goes on to say that graduates should have the necessary skills to be employable in the rapidly evolving labor environment. This is why the nation's present educational system has to be overhauled (Daily Star, May 11, 2019). All Bangladeshi institutions should educate their students about the value of soft skills in creating high-caliber graduates. Soft skills are some of the character and personal

characteristics of a person that are essential for success in professional and personal life. Soft skills include communication skills, teamwork, problem-solving skills, and adaptability. Malcolm Gladwell (2011) asserts that those with superior soft skills outperform those with inferior soft skills in terms of employment and problem-solving. Just as hard skills provide technical knowledge, soft skills help in interacting properly in the workplace. Practicing and developing soft skills is very important for building a successful career. These are skills that help us interact and perform in our personal and professional lives. They improve people's social and professional skills. Soft skills are personal skills such as behavior, communication, leadership, and teamwork. These skills teach us how to work well with others in the workplace, which is very important for professional success. These include communication skills (speaking and listening clearly), leadership (giving the right direction to the organization), problem solving (dealing with crises intelligently), and the ability to work in a team (achieving good results through collective efforts). Communication, problem-solving, leadership, empathy, and creative thinking are examples of soft talents (Wentz, 2012). A significant amount of money and effort is expended on soft skills instruction to help employees learn them and become team members, successful speakers, and adept problem-solvers in the workplace (Kellerman 2012). Patacsil and Tablatin (2017) conducted research on IT professionals and discovered that soft skills practice is essential for business growth and sustainability. Interpersonal communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills are essential for an employee to evolve into a skilled professional (Naim, 2017). Employers seek employees that are ethical, amiable, leaders, and team players in addition to technical understanding of their trade (Johnson, 2016; Majid et al., 2012). As a result, soft skill assessments are commonly used when hiring new personnel.

Figure 1. Employability skills framework



Source: Haidar, 2025.

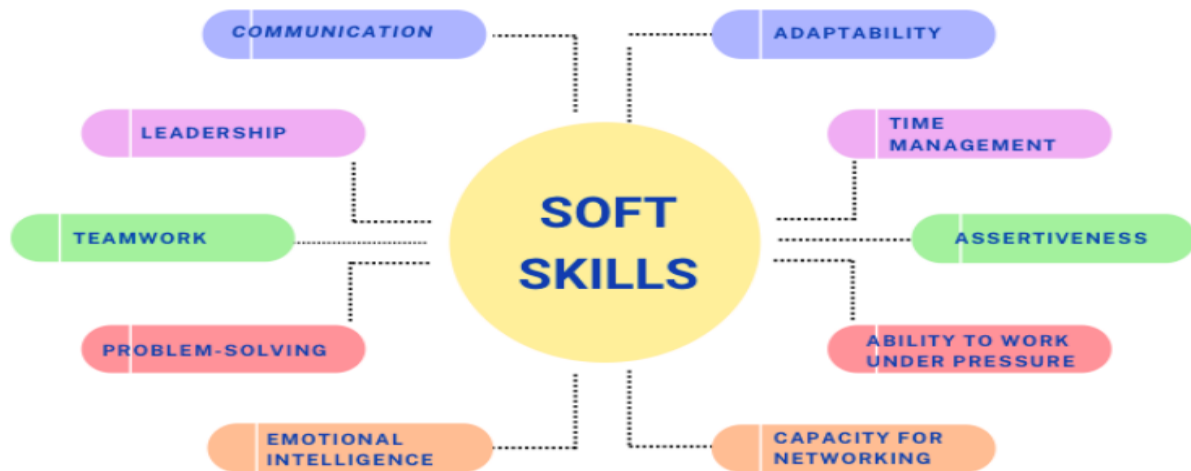
Hard skills are essential for technical or specialist tasks, such as programming, finance, or machine operation, whereas soft skills include talents to work with others, such as interaction, problem-solving, and time management. However, soft skills are required in all workplaces. This study seeks to investigate the main soft skills that are associated with employability. It also encourages the development and use of soft skills in the job search for freshly graduated individuals. Because relatively few studies have been undertaken on soft skills practice in Bangladesh, this study will encourage academic institutes to place a greater focus on soft skills development for their students and include these into curriculums.

Significance of Soft Skills in the Age of Technology

Although technological advancements are changing the way we work, the demand for soft skills will never decrease. No matter how advanced artificial intelligence and machine learning become, the ability to connect with people, lead, and create creative ideas will remain the same. Soft skills are essential for professional development and improving personal relationships in the workplace. They increase work efficiency, leadership, and coordination skills. The importance of soft skills in career building is discussed below. It goes beyond just knowing how to do technical tasks and helps in building relationships in the workplace and performing tasks correctly. To be successful in any profession, you need to know how to interact with colleagues and work in a team as well as your work. It is

a distinct combination of personal characteristics, mental and practical abilities, and all temperaments and personality traits that enable creativity. It is also reflected in conduct and behavior (Binkley et al., 2012). Soft skills give you the ability to think creatively and make quick decisions to solve problems, as well as help in dealing with crises. Whenever challenges arise in the workplace, soft skills are needed along with skills and experience.

Figure 2. Elements of soft skills



Source: Mountassir, 2023.

According to Dossey et al. (2006), problem-solving talent is a mix of mental and emotional processes employed in a variety of contexts and activities; as ability, it enables an individual to attain aims that could not be accomplished using simple, well-known routines or algorithms. Maintaining good relationships with colleagues and superiors is essential if you want to progress in any organization. Communication skills, humility, and a positive attitude among soft skills help in building strong relationships with others, which plays an important role in professional success. According to Binkley et al. (2012), it encompasses the capacity to adjust to changing roles and workplace responsibilities as well as the capacity to carry out productive tasks in the face of fluctuating priorities. A process of deliberate, self-regulatory assessment and evaluation, critical thinking is a collection of situation-dependent broad cognitive skills. During this process, the person uses cognitive skills and tactics to increase the likelihood of a desired outcome or decision (Facione, 1990). This is essential to be a good leader in any team. Apart from leadership abilities, the ability to work in a team ensures success in an organization. With the right soft skills, you can motivate and manage the team effectively. It promotes the ability to remain flexible and composed in case of shock, which ensures functional survival.

Status of Graduate Employability in Bangladesh

Still, the current scenario in Bangladesh is unsatisfactory. According to the Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2018 study, young unemployment in Bangladesh quadrupled in just 7 years, from 2010 to 2017. Since Bangladesh steadily transforms into a middle-income country, such data should cause concern, since the demand for highly trained and educated personnel would rise in the future years. Bangladesh's youthful people must play an important part in the country's growth, yet current statistics show that the majority of graduates in Bangladesh struggle to find suitable work. According to research titled "Bangladesh Employment and Labor Market Watch 2018" issued by the Center for Development and Employment Research (CDER), Bangladesh has the highest jobless rate among tertiary-degree graduates.

In its last Labour Force Survey 2024, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) provided us with data that, while first comforting, crumble when examined closely. The paper states that the country's unemployment rate increased by 160,000 in just one year, from 2.46 million in 2023 to 2.62 million by December 2024. Out of 180 million people, only 2.62 million are unemployed, according to the report. That appears doable on paper. However, when you remove the definitions, statistical trickery, and ground reality, you see an employment crisis that is undermining the core of our economy. The most concerning result is that 29% of young people without jobs between the ages of 15 and 29 had a college degree. The very demographic that ought to be advancing the nation is being

left behind. 7.13% of the unemployed have higher secondary credentials, while 13.54% have bachelor's degrees (Dhaka Tribune, 2026).

Figure 3. Esteemed Graduated Unemployment



Source: Suresh, 2015.

The high percentage of unemployment among university graduates may be ascribed to a lack of skills required to get a job after graduation. Furthermore, the majorities of occupations in Bangladesh are in the informal economy and provide poor wages. However, the country's education system fails to empower and prepare graduates by acquiring the necessary abilities to compete in the job market (Uddin, 2021). Unfortunately, most university graduates in Bangladesh today are unable to satisfy the expectations of today's dynamic and competitive labor market. As a result, corporations are obliged to employ foreign workers. Currently, numerous foreigners have been hired in many economic areas in Bangladesh. Foreigners are mostly employed in the mid-level management levels of enterprises, with significant recruitment for top-level roles such as management directors at several multinational corporations in Bangladesh. According to Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, there are 20,988 foreign workers in Bangladesh (Prothom Alo, June 13, 2023). Employers claim that a lack of technical, professional, and linguistic skills is limiting Bangladeshi graduates' career opportunities. Some analysts went on to say that the major reason for Bangladesh's high unemployment rate is because higher education institutions in the country are failing to create highly trained graduates, which, according to data, are a critical necessity in today's labor market. Because many fresh graduates in Bangladesh are unemployed each year, policymakers, academics, and institutions must act quickly to improve graduate employment in Bangladesh. Two million young Bangladeshis enter the workforce each year, but relatively few of them possess the skills that companies are looking for. In addition to improving the lives of youth and their families, resolving that mismatch is essential to advancing the nation's remarkable achievements to combat poverty. However, Bangladesh's higher education institutions have been executing their curricula with little to no consideration for the demands of life and the workplace, which results in graduates who are unemployed. The high rate of unemployment among Bangladeshi university graduates is caused by both a dearth of job openings and a lack of applicants with the necessary marketable skills that businesses appreciate (Uddin, 2021). Concerns over their suitability for the position and employability abilities were also voiced by employers. Critical weaknesses in critical and analytical thinking, communication, problem resolution, technical skills, numerical skills, decision-making, capacity and desire to learn, and interpersonal connection skills were discovered by researchers among graduates (Uddin, 2021; Nusrat & Sultana, 2019). However, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS, 2018), 29.8% of the nation's young are neither in education nor in employment or training (NEET) because they lack the necessary skills, while the percentage of youth unemployment is 10.6%.

Essential Soft Skills for Employability

There are some special skills among them, which are helpful in our personal and professional lives. Let's know some key soft skills and their importance. Currently, competing in the competitive labor market based just on outcomes is extremely challenging. A student needs develop a variety of talents to do this. Soft talents are not genetically determined (Coyle, 2009). We can learn them in context. The following are some activities that might aid in the development of soft skills while a student at a university:

Table 1. Key Soft Skills for University Graduate

| Key Soft Skills for University Graduate | |
|---|--|
| Resume Writing | It's not the ability to run Face book; Internet browsing, skills to write convincing emails, updated knowledge about necessary websites, creating updated CVs and skills in various applications (Marr, 2022). |
| Language skills | Learners must be ability to speak and write Bengali and English in pure language. Soft skills are critical to language acquisition success because they help learners interact effectively, collaborate, and adjust to varied cultural and linguistic situations (Serik et al. 2024). |
| Presentation skills | Presentation abilities, both formal and informal, are crucial for students. Since it improves one's speaking abilities, this is one of the abilities that may be enhanced and developed with practice. In seminars, classrooms, and conferences, a large number of ESP learners and language users have tackled it as professors. Along the way, it fosters the development of several other skills, such as conversation, negotiation, and public speaking (Boyd, 1989). |
| Networking skills | Refraining from lobbying; monitoring the employer's organization; and becoming ready by staying in contact with workers in the desired role. Gaining benefits from combining the distinct experience, expertise, resources, and capacities of network participants, as well as obtaining an efficient approach to executing educational initiatives, are the objectives of networking collaboration (Akhtaryev et al., 2015). Decentralization, when horizontal communication leaps over vertical communication barriers, is a hallmark of effective networking (Remorenko, 2003). |
| Communication Skills | Oral and written communication skills are essential in every profession. Clear and effective communication is very important for exchanging information correctly in the workplace. Speech and writing should be clear, concise and easy to understand. This creates proper understanding with others in the workplace and reduces misunderstandings. Importance of Being a Good Listener: An important aspect of communication is the ability to listen. Being a good listener means listening carefully to the opinions and problems of others and responding correctly. This is helpful in problem solving and teamwork in the workplace. |
| Teamwork | Through a successful teamwork, multiple people can achieve more results by working together. Through teamwork, it is possible to use the skills of each member correctly and the pace of work increases. Effective interaction between members of a team improves the results of the team. Showing respect for everyone's opinions and work is the main condition for a successful teamwork. The teamwork skill is one of the soft skills that business practitioners or professionals at all level must have. Teamwork must show those values to harmonize the cooperation between workers or employees in order to build the work in a team effectively and productively. Working in a team can give more achievement compared to an individual work (Peter, & Simatupang, 2019). |
| Leadership Skills | Anyone can be a leader in the future, so developing leadership skills is important for your career. Having leadership skills means that you can give direction to a team and motivate team members. To be a proper leader, you must have confidence, problem-solving skills, and decision-making skills. Leadership skills can bring progress in your career. Leadership ability is the capacity of an administrator to allocate people who are qualified for a position based on their competencies, assign tasks to maximize staff members' talents, and give and convey a strategic plan to workers in order to inspire others to take action. In addition, the administrator fosters broad engagement in goal-setting, critical thinking, and problem-solving while taking calculated risks to provide creative and practical answers. According to Ngang (2012), leadership capacity also relates to an administrator's ability to empower staff members to make decisions, use them correctly, and adapt quickly and flexibly. |
| Problem-Solving Skills | When various crises or problems arise in the workplace, the ability to solve them is very important. A skilled worker will not only report the problem, but also suggest alternative strategies to solve the problem. The Importance of Creative Thinking and Solving: |

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| | Solving problems often becomes difficult without creative thinking. Creative thinking increases your problem-solving skills and makes you competitive. The process of recognizing issues, developing potential solutions, and putting the best answers into practice in relatively novel circumstances is the foundation of problem-solving skills (Graesser et al., 2018; Pinter & Cisar, 2018). |
| Positive Attitude | A positive attitude increases your performance and efficiency at work. It not only improves your own performance, but also helps in maintaining good relations with your colleagues. |
| Adaptability | Easily accepting new situations and changes in the workplace is an essential skill. In today's fast-changing world, the way of working also changes rapidly. If you cannot adapt to these changes, it is difficult to achieve success in the workplace. The ability to adapt is very important in building a career. The ability to adapt to a new workplace, new environment or new way of working will keep you in a competitive position. |
| Time Management | The Importance of Adhering to Work Time Limits: This is one of the main conditions in the workplace. If you cannot complete your work on time, your reputation at work may be damaged. Prioritizing Work: When you have to juggle multiple tasks at the same time, it is very important to prioritize which tasks to do first. By doing priority-based tasks, you will be able to work more efficiently. By redefining time as a question of perspective, Vanderkam (2016) encouraged professionals to think about not just what they do but also how and why they do it. This approach may be put into practice with the aid of tools like SMART objectives, digital planners, and prioritizing matrices, but both internal discipline and outside assistance are necessary for success. |
| Humility | Modesty is an important soft skill, which increases your acceptance in personal and professional life. With a humble attitude, you will get respect and cooperation from everyone at work, which will help you move forward in your career. |
| Voluntary Works | Projects are often extremely effective learning aids (Laur, 2013). During the university years, volunteer activities and projects can help students develop soft skills. Attempting to raise money for a community or planning a congress or fair for a certain foundation greatly enhances problem-solving and communication abilities. Persuasion abilities are necessary for a successful contribution collection in order to persuade individuals or organizations to make donations. Once more, every nonprofit organization has an excessive number of volunteers, and each volunteer must cooperate with others. Because employees in nonprofit companies do not labor for pay, they are more complicated organizations. Therefore, it is more difficult to force individuals to finish a single task than it is for organizations. |
| Ethics | Ethics is the significant soft skills required in their employment, behind entrepreneurship. However, the true problem comes in the efficient application of ethical principles and the proper functioning of experts as members of various teams through effective communication. Thus, adequate guidance and assessment of practical engineering abilities is urgently required. We emphasize on the educational evolution of the acquired ethical and communicative abilities (Sari & Soelistiyowati, 2020). |

Source: Data processed by author

Proper practice and development of soft skills is one of the main components of achieving success at work. These skills will help you improve your personality and move you forward on the path of a successful career. Soft skills play an important role at every level of career. It not only enhances technical skills, but also creates a strong foundation for success in the workplace.

Challenges in the Integration of Soft Skills

Unfortunately, many learners face a number of problems when working in professional settings that will most likely need them to "think on the spot" when giving presentations or communicating with native speakers. The capacity to apply the information and abilities they have learned in classrooms or during training in the job is another difficulty. The Conference Board of Canada, the American Society for Training and Development, and the US Office of Educational Research and Improvement have all emphasized the need of training both hard and soft skills in the workplace, which is reflected in the employment standards of European society. Additionally, they have divided the

essential employability skills profile into three categories: Academic context-relevant abilities include critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and presentation. Personal management abilities include taking initiative, establishing objectives, having a positive outlook, and having confidence in oneself. Teamwork abilities include cooperation, reciprocity, respect for others, and leadership traits (including the ability to present) (Leroux & Lafleur, 1995). Islam (2019) mention that several Challenges found in Teaching and Learning Environment in Tertiary education is following:

Figure 4. Challenges found in Teaching and Learning Environment in Tertiary Education



Source: Islam, 2019.

Strategy to Improve Soft Skills

Regular practice and effort are required to improve these skills. This can bring success in both your professional and personal life. Self-study/ Learning on your own are one of the best ways to develop soft skills. Students can learn about different aspects of soft skills from books, online articles, video tutorials, and podcasts. Make yourself more skilled by studying regularly (Almeida, 2023). According to Chan (2011), university courses and programs are created to guarantee that graduates have the seven aspects of soft skills that are thought to be necessary for the industry in addition to professional and functional abilities and core knowledge.

There are many courses available online or offline, which teach soft skills. In particular, you can take various courses based on communication, leadership, and time management. These courses will give you the right direction and create opportunities for improvement.

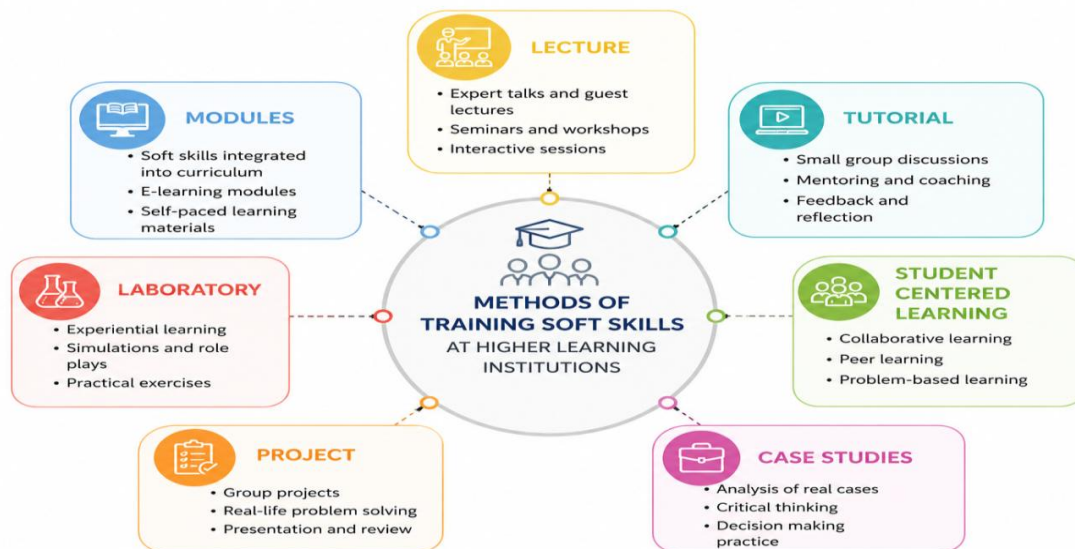
Learn problem-solving techniques: When a problem comes up, think about how to solve it instead of just focusing on the problem. Think creatively, take advice from others, and find different alternative solutions. Problem-solving skills can be improved through practice.

Workshops: By directly participating in workshops, gain practical knowledge and experience. Participate in various workshops, where experts teach various soft skill techniques. Workshops give you the opportunity to learn through real-world experience.

Develop leadership skills: To acquire leadership skills, first take small responsibilities. Take a leadership role in any team or project. Be confident in your work and be ready to help others. Regular practice and experience will make you a better leader.

Focus on Time Management: If you want to be successful, you need to use your time properly. Make a to-do list, decide which task to do first. Working for a specific amount of time every day will improve your time management skills. Through regular study, training, and experience, you can improve your soft skills, which will play an important role in your professional and personal life.

Figure 5. Methods of training soft skills at higher learning institutions



Source: Chan, 2011.

The Future of Soft Skills in the Workplace

As technology advances in the future, the importance of soft skills will increase. Human emotions, relationships, and leadership skills will always be essential in the workplace. Although technological advancements are changing the way we work, the demand for soft skills will never decrease. No matter how advanced artificial intelligence and machine learning become, they are essential for building relationships with people, leading, and solving creative problems. In the future, those who will be successful in the workplace will have a high level of soft skills. Leadership, problem-solving, and adaptability will keep employees at the top. Therefore, it is important to practice them now. The importance of soft skills will increase further in the future. As technology advances, the demand for soft skills will increase, which will help employees succeed. Pritchard (2013) has mentioned that 75% of employers are looking for employees with soft skills.

Concluding Comments

Soft skills are not just a plus point in today's workplace, but the foundation of success. The study's findings show that soft skills are a strong predictor of graduate employability in the Bangladesh employment market. According to this study, appropriate talents include communication skills, leadership skills, time management, problem-solving skills, collaboration, networking skills, and so on. This study discovered a significant disparity between education and occupational expectations. Improving soft skills will bring big changes in professional and personal life. Equivalent knowledge of the studied subject and good knowledge of the connectivity of your studied subject in the job market (every subject has connectivity in the job market, learn about them. Furthermore, Finch et al. (2013) found that the most important abilities for successful employment of graduates were "interpersonal," "verbal communication," and "listening." According to this study, these abilities are somewhat necessary for Bangladeshi grads. The key competencies that companies want are "ability and willingness to learn," "teamwork and cooperation," "hard work and a readiness to take extra work," "self-control," and "analytical thinking" (Pang et al., 2018). Bangladesh needs a skilled, creative, and competitive workforce as it steadily develops into an economy with progress, more global mobility, and rapid economic output. One of the most important tools for preparing the present population to fulfill the needs of the ever-changing labor market is education. A new term that emphasizes the integration of discipline study with working activities is "work integrated learning." It may be a useful tool that helps Bangladeshi higher education institutions give their graduates the employability skills they need to succeed in the cutthroat workplace. In order to improve students' job experience and general skills, universities must implement new work-oriented courses. There is need for strong collaboration between industry and university to ensure that graduates acquire the skills.

This study addresses the regional specificities of Bangladesh while examining the efficacy of soft skills. In the prior study of Sultana, (2025) mentions there are critical deficiencies in soft skills among Bangladeshi Graduates. Present study explore sector-specific skill gaps, student perceptions of readiness, and the long-term impact of curriculum reforms, helping to further align higher education with industry needs.

Declarations

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Declaration of Use of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies: The author did not use generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process of the paper.

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