

Empowering Learner Soft Skills in Digital Teaching: A Study of Teacher Perspectives

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Abstract: The necessity of soft skills for digital native learners is paramount, underscoring the urgency of integrating them into pedagogical processes to equip students with essential life competencies for navigating the digital age. This study investigates English educators' perspectives and implementation strategies for fostering eight key soft skills (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, emotional intelligence, leadership, and time management) within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. A mixed-methods approach was employed, gathering data from 35 English teachers using both interviews and a closed-ended questionnaire. The qualitative and quantitative analysis revealed that teachers successfully implement a range of project-based and interactive activities. Specifically, the findings demonstrate that activities such as peer tutoring, role-playing, mini drama projects, group presentations, reader's theatre, and self-peer feedback are effective in empowering all eight targeted soft skills in EFL learners. The study concludes that diversified and project-based activities are highly effective pedagogical tools for the simultaneous development of a broad spectrum of soft skills in the digital teaching environment. These findings offer practical implications for curriculum designers and educators seeking to enhance soft skill development in language education.

Keyword: *Soft skill; Digital teaching; English ; Perspectives*

INTRODUCTION

The students we instruct are digital natives, living in a period of cutting-edge technology that requires a balance between hard and soft abilities to meet contemporary difficulties. A technological or hard dimension of digital skills and the use of ICT tools, as well as a soft dimension pertaining to the social, emotional, and interpersonal aspects of using technology either individually or collectively, make up digital soft skills, which are hybrid competencies (D2S, 2021). Moreover, Moundy et al. (2025) proposed that students' learning outcomes improved as a result of developing digital soft skills, and they expressed great satisfaction and enjoyment with the flipped classroom approach and digital textbook. Then, the development of soft skills among students can develop their confidence in learning (Nugraha, 2023).

Because hard skills are linked to information and job skills, and thus to specific knowledge and easily measurable performance outcomes, soft skills are more challenging to teach and learn than hard skills. Since soft skills involve the inclusion of personal characteristics in any relationship, they are crucial to everyone in any situation. Both technical and interpersonal skills are crucial for students to navigate the digital age. Soft skills refer to interpersonal and behavioral abilities that involve how an individual interacts with others and manages various situations. These abilities are frequently applicable across various positions and sectors. Soft skills are vital for successful

collaboration, communication, and resolving issues in any workplace. They frequently influence how effectively a person blends into a team, handles obstacles, and develops in their position. Shalini and Alamelu (2021) argued that the phrase "soft skills" emphasizes that "soft skills play a significant role in one's success in life particularly in one's profession" and refers to the personality qualities, social graces, language proficiency, personal routines, friendliness, and optimism that distinguish persons to varied degrees. Moreover, the best learning approach for soft skills-based learning is one that emphasizes an active role, focuses on the students, and only uses the lecturer as a facilitator. Soft skills are abstract and more in the affective (feelings) and psychomotor (behavior) domains, which are individual skills (Muhmin, 2018).

Some research focuses on soft skills in English language teaching such as (Andrievskikh & Lapina, 2021; Boonmoh & Chanchay, 2024; Chocholatá, 2023; Drozdovych, 2016; Imron & Triyanto, 2020; Konobeiev et al., 2022; Moundy et al., 2025; Permata, 2017; Tevdovska, 2015; Umayah et al., 2023; Zogopoulos et al., 2025). Andrievskikh and Lapina (2021) indicated that students can learn from their peers, they are not scared to make mistakes, and learn the English lesson during school, it is the ideal setting for developing soft skills. This allows students to work continuously, persistently, and purposefully. Furthermore, Some activities can develop learners' soft skills such as discussion method, project method, drama, didactic games, storytelling, communication games.(Homolová et al., 2022). To sum up, soft skills are important in the life of a student. Students' academic performance can undoubtedly be improved by possessing these abilities. Students that possess strong communication skills will be able to express themselves clearly in group discussions, public speaking, writings, and presentations. Having strong problem-solving abilities will enable students to overcome obstacles in both their academic and personal lives. Nurlaila and Fadhilah (2023) mentioned that soft skill training can develop students quality in time management, communication, and collaboration. Then, collaborating with peers is encouraged by teamwork, which also aids in the growth of confidence and social skills. In this article, the soft skills highlighted include communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, adaptability and flexibility, emotional intelligence, leadership, and time management. This study examined how educators implement teaching activities to foster students' soft skills in the Englishclassroom.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach to detail how English instructors utilize instructional activities to develop students' soft skills within the classroom. The research utilized a mixed-methods design to strengthen the findings, complementing the quantitative data with qualitative insights. The primary quantitative instrument was a closed-ended questionnaire comprising ten statements, adapted from existing frameworks (Boonmoh & Chanchay, 2024; Malykhin et al., 2024; Tejawiani et

al., 2023; Zouali, 2024). To ensure validity and reliability, the questionnaire underwent rigorous pilot testing and validation using judgments from six subject matter experts. The study participants consisted of 35 English instructors working in the Ogan Komerang Ulu regency. All participants held degrees in English instruction, and their teaching experience varied widely, ranging from one year to twenty years. To bolster and contextualize the quantitative findings, the researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews with a subsample of 15 English teachers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The identity of the respondents is presented in chart 1.

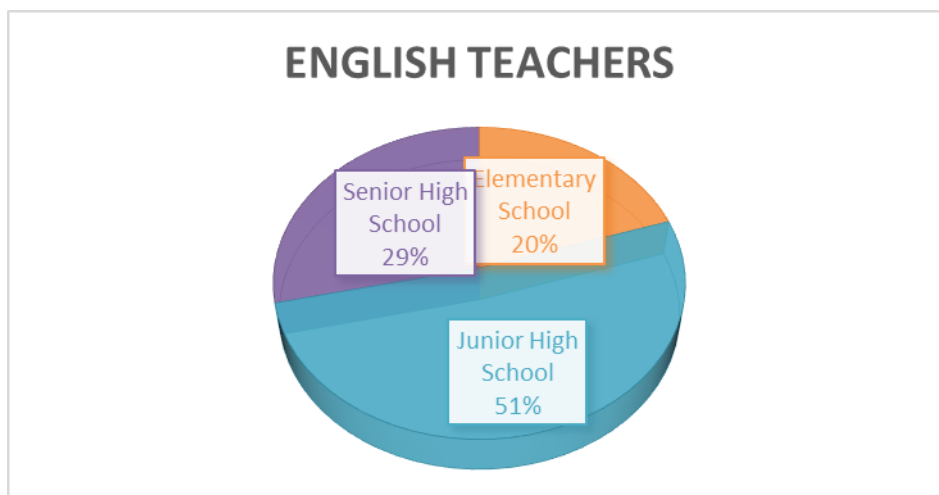


Chart 1. Respondent identity

Chart 1, effectively illustrates how the English teacher participants are distributed across different school levels. The analysis reveals that the largest group of educators, constituting **51%** of the sample, are employed at the **Junior High School** level, meaning that over half of the research data is drawn from middle school contexts. The second most numerous group is from **Senior High Schools**, accounting for **29%** of the participants. The smallest proportion of the sample, at **20%**, consists of English teachers from **Elementary Schools**. In summary, the findings of this research are most heavily weighted by the perspectives of Junior High School teachers, followed by Senior High School teachers, with the least representation from the Elementary level. This distribution is an important consideration when evaluating the generalizability of the study's conclusions. The teaching experience details of these participants are further presented in Chart 2.

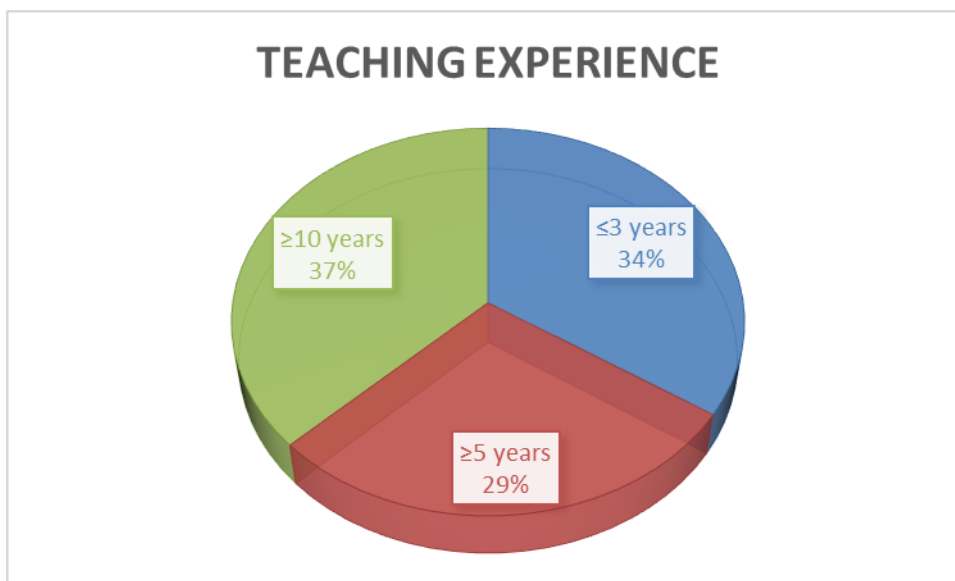


Chart 2. Teaching experience of the Participants

Chart 2 effectively illustrates the distribution of research participants based on their years of teaching experience, providing valuable context regarding the teacher expertise in the sample. The largest segment of participants, representing **37%**, is comprised of highly seasoned teachers with **10 years or more (≥10 years)** of teaching experience. This suggests that a significant portion of the surveyed staff are highly experienced educators. The second largest group, accounting for **34%**, consists of teachers with **3 years or less (≤3 years)** of experience, indicating a substantial number of relatively new teachers were included in the study. The smallest group, making up **29%**, is composed of teachers with experience in the range of **5 to 9 years (implied, or ≥5 years)**. Overall, the participant sample exhibits a bimodal distribution, characterized by large groups of both highly experienced and relatively new teachers, with the fewest participants falling into the intermediate experience band.

The Closed-Ended Questionnaire Result

The Closed-Ended Questionnaire Result is presented on table 1 and table 2.

Table 1. The Questionnaire Result Number 1-5

No	Statement(s)	Mean
1.	1. Group presentation can develop students` communication and collaboration	3.8
2.	6. Group project can develop students` time management, flexibility and adaptability, and emotional intelligence	3.8
3.	10. Self-Peer feedback can develop students` adaptability, flexibility, emotional intelligence, and	3.6

communication		
4.	7. Group Project can develop students` creativity, communication, critical thinking, collaboration	3.5
5.	8. Mini Drama Project can develop students` creativity, communication, critical thinking, collaboration	3.5

Table 1 indicated that Group Presentation and Group Project (Mean: 3.8): Two activities, group presentation (developing communication and collaboration) and group project (developing time management, flexibility and adaptability, and emotional intelligence), received the highest mean score of 3.8. This suggests a strong agreement among respondents that these activities are effective in fostering those particular skill sets. Furthermore, Self-Peer Feedback (Mean: 3.6): Self-peer feedback is rated slightly lower, with a mean of 3.6. It's noted for developing adaptability, flexibility, emotional intelligence, and communication. Moreover, Group Project and Mini Drama Project (Mean: 3.5): Both group projects (focusing on creativity, communication, critical thinking, and collaboration) and mini drama projects (also focusing on creativity, communication, critical thinking, and collaboration) have a mean score of 3.5. This indicates a slightly lower, but still positive, perception of their effectiveness compared to the activities with higher mean scores. Overall, the data suggests that group-based activities are highly regarded for their potential in developing a wide range of essential skills, including communication, collaboration, time management, flexibility, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. Self-peer feedback also shows promise in similar areas. The result indicated that group presentation and group project can develop learners` soft skills which is in line with the finding from (Marlina, 2021; Rukminingsih et al., 2024; Wardani & Iriani, 2022). Soft skills such as self-awareness, trust, flexibility, critical thinking, organizational awareness, attitude, initiative, empathy, integrity, self-control, leadership, problem-solving, risk-taking, and time management can all be improved by using the PBL model in the classroom.

Table2. Questionnaire Result Number 6-10

No	Statement(s)	Mean
6.	5. Reader Theatre can develop students` adaptability, leadership, collaboration, and flexibility	3.4
7.	4. Peer tutoring can develop students` leadership, communication, collaboration skills	3.2
8.	9. Mini Drama Project can develop students` time management, flexibility, adaptability, and emotional intelligence	3.1
9.	2. Group presentation can develop students` critical thinking, creativity, flexibility, and emotional intelligence	3.0
10.	3. Role playing can develop students` communication, collaboration, and emotional intelligence	2.9

Table 2 continues the analysis of educational activities and their perceived effectiveness in developing student soft skills, presenting the lower-scoring statements from the same survey or study. The Mean scores indicate the average level of agreement or perception of impact for each activity. The detailed finding is described, first, Reader Theatre (Mean: 3.4): Reader Theatre is seen as moderately effective in developing students' adaptability, leadership, collaboration, and flexibility, with a mean score of 3.4. second, Peer Tutoring (Mean: 3.2): Peer tutoring is rated slightly lower, with a mean of 3.2, for its role in developing leadership, communication, and collaboration skills. Third, Mini Drama Project (Mean: 3.1): While earlier (in the previous table) the Mini Drama Project scored 3.5 for creativity and communication, its effectiveness in developing time management, flexibility, adaptability, and emotional intelligence is perceived as lower, with a mean score of 3.1. This suggests its impact varies depending on the specific skills being evaluated. Fourth, Group Presentation (Mean: 3.0): Similar to the Mini Drama Project, group presentation scored highly (3.8) for communication and collaboration. However, its perceived impact on critical thinking, creativity, flexibility, and emotional intelligence is considerably lower, with a mean of 3.0. This indicates that while group presentations are excellent for certain skills, their contribution to others might be less significant. The last, Role Playing (Mean: 2.9): Role playing received the lowest mean score of 2.9. It's identified for developing communication, collaboration, and emotional intelligence, but the low mean suggests respondents found it less effective in these areas compared to other activities. In summary, this section of the data highlights activities that are perceived as less impact in fostering the soft skills listed, particularly when compared to the higher-scoring activities presented previously. It suggests that the effectiveness of an activity can vary significantly depending on the particular skills it aims to develop.

One of the best ways to assist your team members become more self-aware and confident is through role-playing. The team as a whole may benefit greatly from their increased self-assurance in their communication and other abilities. Improved performance and effectiveness through facilitated practice of various actions and discussing specific difficulties and concerns with a partner is the main advantage of employing role-plays. Effective communication, creative thinking, teamwork, and other abilities pertaining to personal personality are all included in the category of soft skills, which are a collection of abilities that affect how we interact with others. This finding is line with (Permana et al., 2021) that indicated that a variety of techniques, tactics, student-centered learning models, and attitude habituation are used to implement learning in order to build students' hard and soft abilities.

The Interview Result: Candidate Strengths in Group Project Implementation

The interview highlights a candidate who possesses a strong pedagogical approach, particularly in the implementation of group projects. The candidate's methodology demonstrates a clear understanding of how to foster essential 21st-century skills and promote a collaborative learning environment. Here the example of the interviewee answer on how develop learners' soft skill during the teaching and learning activities.

“I have implemented group project. It makes students collaborate to others classmate, work together, and I select the group member randomly so they should interact with others not only their close friends”

“ In my class, I have ever implemented group presentation after students did the group project. In my opinion..., dividing students into group in doing project or assignment can make them care of each other, they learn how to collaborate and communicate to the others. To develop students skill to lead the project from start to finish, I used peer tutoring. It can build students soft skills such as leadership, emotional intelligence, time management, collaboration, and communicative skill.

“During the group project such as drama, role playing, peer-tutoring and group discussion, these activities can increase the learners` creativity, critical thinking, time management, and how to control their emotion and respect each other ability and personality”

It can be derived that the group projects such group discussion, presentation, drama, role play can promote collaboration and interaction: The candidate emphasizes the importance of diverse interactions by implementing randomized group member selection. This strategy ensures that students engage with a wider range of classmates, moving beyond their close friends, and thus developing broader collaborative abilities. For developing holistic skills, the candidate effectively utilizes group activities such as drama, role-playing, and group discussions to cultivate a variety of crucial skills beyond academic content. These activities are specifically designed to enhance learner creativity through imaginative and expressive tasks, enhance critical thinking by encouraging analysis, problem-solving, and reasoned discussion, to develop time management because as students learn to coordinate tasks and meet deadlines within a shared project, to develop emotional intelligence and social skills by fostering the ability to control emotions, respect diverse abilities, and appreciate different personalities within a team setting. This finding is in line with the finding from (Malykhin et al., 2024) that indicated that the most successful exercises for soft skill development such as discussions and debates, games, role-playing, individual and group projects, various essay formats, research activities, etc. Next, peer tutoring aids students in improving their leadership, teamwork, communication, and emotional intelligence. This result is consistent with research from (Anggeraini, 2023), which showed that peer tutoring can improve students' communicative and collaborative abilities. In summary, the interview reveals a candidate who is adept at designing and implementing group projects that not only facilitate collaborative learning but also significantly contribute to students' cognitive, social, and emotional development.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study emphatically underscore the recognized criticality of soft skills including communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and emotional intelligence which are vital for future employees, effective leaders, and successful career development. These skills, rooted in behavioral strategies and character traits, are challenging to measure but indispensable for navigating complex professional and life scenarios in the digital age. This research confirmed that English instructors employ interactive and project-based instructional activities, such as group presentations, group projects, and peer tutoring, to actively cultivate these skills. However, the study also revealed a critical tension. While teacher perceptions (Table 1) indicate high self-efficacy and strong belief in the effectiveness of these soft

skill strategies, the students' measured English proficiency (Table 2) demonstrates a significant failure rate. This highlights that the successful development of soft skills through engagement and collaboration does not automatically guarantee mastery of core academic content. In essence, while the pedagogical strategies successfully create an environment conducive to soft skill empowerment, future efforts must focus on reconciling this soft skill integration with rigorous subject objectives. The core challenge for educators in the digital teaching era is to design activities that foster collaboration and critical thinking *while simultaneously* driving measurable improvement in fundamental hard skills, ensuring learners are holistically prepared for both job performance and academic success.

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