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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Soft Skills Required by Primary Teachers in Morocco for High-Quality Education

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Soft skills play a crucial role in the effectiveness and performance of primary school teachers in their schools, directly affecting the quality of teaching and student learning. The aim of this study is to assess which of the twelve soft skills that are part of the primary school curriculum have been acquired by teachers during their professional careers, thanks to the different training courses they have attended. It also aims to identify which of these skills may be important to enhance their employability and their ability to interact with students to promote their academic success and personal development. In this study, a quantitative approach is adopted to collect data from 492 primary school teachers of the regional academy of Rabat-Salé-Kénitra. Research has clearly shown that all soft skills are developed with significant disparities. Primary teachers in Morocco emphasize resilience, critical thinking and communication as the most crucial soft skills.

INTRODUCTION

Soft skills are of paramount importance in the field of education. Such competencies facilitate the advancement of both the individual teachers' personal growth and their professional development. (Peyron et Lanquar, 2023). Armed with these skills, teachers are able to better manage the dynamics of the classroom while maintaining a stable and supportive learning environment.

To improve teaching methods in schools and prevent learning from declining, teachers need to not only develop professional but also soft skills. To achieve this, it is essential that they are provided with high quality training in this area. This will enable them to develop these skills in their students and promote high quality teaching.

Therefore, teachers need to be equipped with a wide range of life skills to ensure that teaching is effective and that students succeed. Among these skills, we refer to the ability to think critically, to solve problems creatively, to implement effective instructional strategies, to understand complex situations, to explore different perspectives, and to find innovative solutions.

In Morocco, as in other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), youth interest in new technologies is on the rise, reflecting a strong interest in soft skills. With the aim of promoting effective and beneficial learning, the national education system adopted Regional Life Skills and Citizenship Education (LSCE) to implement a new program integrating soft skills into primary curricula.

The article aims to identify the soft skills developed by primary school teachers and to spot the most important ones among those included in the programmatic and conceptual framework of the LSCE. This will promote the implementation of personalized training programs based on the individual needs of each teacher, which could optimize the effectiveness of the training.

Indeed, we seek answers to the following questions: Which soft skills do primary school teachers develop during different training courses, and which are considered most important for professional success?

The first phase of the research is devoted to reviewing the constructivist literature on the various soft skills mentioned in elementary curriculum frameworks, as well as the importance of these skills to teachers. In the second part, a descriptive statistical analysis is carried out, based on the results of a questionnaire sent to the primary school teachers working in the regional academy Rabat-Salé-Kénitra.

Which soft skills are essential in the primary cycle?

The new curriculum of primary schools has identified a set of twelve soft skills that are grouped into four key areas of learning for elementary school students, as follows:

1. *Creativity:*

Creativity is the ability to come up with innovative and technical ideas, often in collaboration with others (Mnisri et Nagati, 2012). It is closely linked to critical thinking and the ability to solve problems. According to Bonnardel and Lubart (2019), creativity is influenced by the cognitive skills of the individual, such as the ability to analyze and evaluate. Creative thinking is essential for creative people, but creating also involves social and personal skills. Consequently, it is essential not only in the arts but also in solving everyday life problems, learning, and work.

2. *Critical thinking :*

Boisvert (2015) states that critical thinking is a vital skill for academic success and life in general. It allows for thoughtful thinking by evaluating situations, asking questions, and exploring different ways of thinking. Critical thinking facilitates the reflection of individuals on their own thinking and the development of intentional thinking processes, such as evaluating arguments and making informed decisions.

3. *Problem Solving:*

Coulet (2011) asserts that problem-solving is an essential skill for navigating complicated situations and finding effective solutions. The process of solving a problem involves identifying the problem, planning steps to achieve a solution, implementing these steps, monitoring progress, and evaluating results. The success of achieving a desired goal necessitates a methodical and structured approach.

4. *Cooperation :*

Cooperation is the act of being and behaving cooperatively, which is achieved by working together to attain a common goal that is mutually beneficial. It is often seen as synonymous with team collaboration and active collaboration.

5. *Negotiation :*

The act of negotiation involves communicating with at least two parties to come up with a solution that aligns with their divergent interests. As a skill, negotiation requires a person's ability to

participate interactively and effectively with others, to demonstrate leadership skills, and to know when to say no to something that would compromise one's safety.

6. Decision-making:

Decision making is a fundamental cognitive process of human behavior that consists of selecting a preferred option from a set of alternatives based on certain criteria, according to Wang & Ruhe (2007). The ability to make decisions is critical in all life situations; it is a life skill that is closely related to the ability to think critically, to collaborate, and to negotiate.

7. Self-management:

This competency is personal. Self-management plays a paramount role in the empowerment of individuals by facilitating the exchange of knowledge and allowing them to explore, learn, and develop skills that go beyond the theoretical and didactic (Denis et al., 2013). In this regard, it allows individuals to control their emotions and improve their emotional well-being.

8. Resilience:

In the programmatic and conceptual framework, UNICEF (2017) considers resilience competence as an individual's ability to adapt to changing situations. Not just survival, acceptance, or resignation to an unacceptable situation, but a constructive approach to adversity. Resisting negative views and behaviors that legitimize hatred, and violence is part of resilience competency.

9. Communication:

Joly (2009) states that communication encompasses the act of communicating, transmitting, and informing. The development of interpersonal skills occurs in the context of social relationships between two or more individuals. Improving one's communication skills is a continuous process that has significant implications for individuals throughout their lifespan. This includes both verbal and non-verbal communication abilities.

10. Respect of diversity :

In the context of the LSCE Initiative, respect for diversity constitutes a pivotal interpersonal life skill. This concept hinges on the assumption that all individuals possess inherent equality within a shared context. However, this equality is not universal, as it may fluctuate depending on factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political convictions, or other personal attributes (UNICEF, 2017).

11. Empathy

In their 2023 study, Jean Decety put forth the notion that empathy entails internalizing norms that can be employed for the protection of others and serves as a motivating factor for individuals seeking the well-being of others. Nevertheless, it entails a certain cost in terms of cognitive, emotional, and energy resources. Empathy allows for the comprehension of another person's emotional state and the capacity to experience that state oneself, without any form of judgment. Moreover, the capacity for empathy represents a crucial aspect of social competence and the ability to form and maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships.

12. Participation:

The act of participating is an initiative designed to fortify both individual and communal empowerment. Those who engage in participation are dedicated and proactive participants in the

democratic process, advocating for the safeguarding of their inalienable rights. The objective is to develop the skills required to engage with others in an effective manner, to participate in and influence decisions and activities, and to facilitate the achievement of shared objectives.

The acquisition of these life skills enables individuals to confront the increasing complexities of daily life by fostering their capacity for sound decision-making and responsible, well-judged action, thereby safeguarding their personal and social well-being. In view of the above, it is of the utmost importance that teachers themselves develop these skills; this will ensure a more effective pedagogical approach and improved learning outcomes in the context of this emerging academic discipline.

What are the needs of primary school teachers in terms of soft skills?

A recent study examining the training of teachers in life skills revealed that only one-quarter of the teaching staff had undergone such training (Choukri et al., 2024). The participating teachers asserted that the emphasis was on the theoretical aspect rather than the competencies listed in the primary curriculum, which was not really their expectation.

In order to ascertain the significance of effective teacher training for educators in this field, a study was undertaken on the developed "Teach Primary" approach in primary classes. According to the results of this research, it is important to use effective teaching methods such as lesson facilitation, comprehension monitoring, and encouragement of critical thinking to strengthen the bonds between educators and learners and to improve academic results of the learners (Carter & al .2024)."

Further, A systematic research assessing the relationship between life competencies and pedagogical preparation of teachers at the JEC institution in Chiclayo, Peru, underscores the importance of these competencies for educators' training and professional development. The results suggest that overall leadership practices influence educational outcomes and the effectiveness of teachers (Uceda-Pintado, I. & al. 2022). According to these studies, learning life skills is one of the crucial aspects of learning and the relationships that exist between teachers and learners. Such skills can be grouped into three categories, namely, transdisciplinary skill sets, skills related to individual characteristics, and social skills.

Moreover, a study looking into the relation between soft skills of teachers and their performance in state schools of Jasaan South, the Philippines, found the teachers' communicate is the major criterion by which they are evaluated in the country, although collaboration, conflict resolution are paramount in promoting good atmosphere in schools and enhancing students' competitiveness academically (Meiraline P. Caga-anan, A. M. V. 2024).

In different research that deals with the relevance of interpersonal skills in teaching and the relationship between a teacher and her students, Touati (2023) argues that educators in the 21st century ought to have a variety of soft skills which include communication, problem solving, working in teams, and leadership. Such skills accomplishment promotes improved learning which indeed enhances communication and good relationships between students and their teachers and in the end, students succeed. Besides, Gibbs (2013) emphasizes that teachers should also be resilient to manage their students' behavioral issues and assist them effectively to perform academically.

To gain a deeper understanding of the most essential soft skills for teachers, a study was undertaken in Malaysia to assess how teachers perceive the most crucial non-technical skills required in the workplace (Ngang, T. & al. (2015). The findings of the study indicate that all soft skills, including communication, critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, lifelong learning, information management, entrepreneurship, ethics, morals, professionalism, and leadership, are perceived as essential for teachers in their professional roles. However, teamwork and communication skills are

identified as the most crucial. Nevertheless, the skills associated with business management are regarded as being the least useful in comparison to those skills.

METHODOLOGY:

The present study employed a quantitative methodology, aiming to identify the soft skills developed by teachers during the different training courses such as teaching practices, new technologies...). Thus, the soft skills they have considered are needed to ensure the quality of teaching. We have set up an online questionnaire for teachers working in the provincial directorates of the regional academy of Rabat-Salé-Kénitra in Morocco. The data collected was analyzed using the statistical software package SPSS 26. Table 1 presents general information on the 492 teachers who responded positively.

Table1: results of personal data

Personal data	Results
Gender	30.9% women; 69.1% men
Diploma	66.6% bachelor, 11% baccalaureate, 18.74% master: 3.67% doctorate
Seniority	12.4% more than 30 years of exercise; 30.7% between 21 and 30 years of exercise; 20.3% between 11 and 20 years of exercise; 37.6% between 1 and 10 years of exercise.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

A three-point scale was employed, comprising values of 1, 2, and 3. This suggests that the responses are categorized into three levels: low, medium, and good. The results presented in Table 2 illustrate that respondents tend to select the options " medium " or "good" for many of the skills under consideration, with an overall mean score ranging from 2.04 to 2.39.

The mean scores for communication skills, participation, and respect for diversity are greater than 2.3, indicating that many individuals have acquired these abilities through formal training. The standard deviations are also low, indicating that the responses are consistent and exhibiting minimal variability.

Furthermore, the survey findings indicated considerable discrepancies in the acquisition of life skills among the respondents. The mean scores for skills such as self- management, creativity, cooperation, decision-making, critical thinking and empathy fall within the range of 2.1 to 2.3. This indicates that participants have demonstrated the acquisition of some of these skills during the program of training.

Conversely, life skills including resilience and negotiation attained average scores of 2.1 or below, suggesting that individuals did not develop these abilities to a notable extent throughout their training. The standard deviations are also considerable (0.639 and 0.638), indicating that the responses are highly variable and that there is a significant degree of heterogeneity in the data set.

It should be highlighted that the average score for resilience is the lowest, indicating that respondents perceive this skill to be the least developed among the various training programs.

Table 2: Soft skills developed during training

Soft skills	Number	Sum	Average	Standard Deviation
Creativity	492	1101	2,24	0,607
Critical thinking	492	1058	2,15	0,604

Problem Solving	492	1115	2,27	0,575
Cooperation	492	1091	2,22	0,608
Negotiation	492	1026	2,09	0,639
Decision-making	492	1073	2,18	0,630
Communication	492	1164	2,37	0,616
Self-management	492	1112	2,26	0,623
Resilience	492	1005	2,04	0,638
Participation	492	1158	2,35	0,606
Respect of diversity	492	1175	2,39	0,576
Empathy	492	1068	2,17	0,631

The survey results indicate variability in the respondents' levels of soft skill development. The most highly developed skills are communication, participation, and respect for diversity. Conversely, skills such as self-management, creativity, cooperation, decision-making, critical thinking, and empathy exhibited average scores.

The mean score of the respondents fell between 2.04 and 2.39, indicating that all soft skills are developed during various training courses, though at varying degrees of mastery. This discrepancy can be attributed to the type of training undergone (face-to-face or distance learning) or to the specific training programs completed, such as those in pedagogical techniques or communication technology, for instance... However, the respondents indicated that the development of life skills, such as resilience and negotiation, lagged the acquisition of other skills during the training courses in which they participated. This indicates that these competencies may have been inadequately integrated or reinforced during the various training programs attended.

In terms of the life skills required for primary education, Table 3 shows that teachers have varying levels of competence. They can be divided into three categories according to their mean value and their standard deviation, as follows:

- **Category 1: The Most Needed Life Skills**

Life skills, including communication, critical thinking, and resilience, were found to have average scores above 2.8, indicating their perceived importance as essential abilities. This is supported by the low standard deviation of these skills, indicating a high level of consistency across participants. These competencies are regarded as being of paramount importance for career success.

- **Category 2: Needed Life Skills**

The skills of empathy, creativity, problem solving, cooperation, self-management, participation, and respect of diversity were found to have average scores ranging from 2.2 to 2.4, with moderate standard deviations. This suggests that these skills are perceived to be important, although less essential than the first category.

- **Category 3: the Least Needed Life Skills**

The results indicate that respondents perceive life skills such as negotiation and decision-making to be less important for success in the workplace, given that the average scores for these abilities fall below 2.2.

The findings indicate that respondents rated the life skills in question as "medium" or "good" on average, with a range from 2.09 to 2.93. This suggests that all these skills are perceived as essential, although their relative importance varies slightly.

Table 3: Soft skills needed during training

Soft skills	Numbers	Sum	Average	Standard Deviation
Creativity	492	1101	2,24	0,61
Critical thinking	492	1418	2,88	0,32
Problem Solving	492	1115	2,27	0,58
Cooperation	492	1091	2,22	0,61
negotiation	492	1026	2,09	0,64
Decision-making	492	1073	2,18	0,63
Communication	492	1440	2,93	0,26
Self-management	492	1112	2,26	0,62
Resilience	492	1386	2,82	0,39
Participation	492	1158	2,35	0,61
Respect of diversity	492	1175	2,39	0,58
Empathy	492	1068	2,17	0,63

The results of the poll suggest that participants considered competencies needed to teach at the primary education level as varying in importance. Skills such as resilience, communication and critical thinking seem to have mean values of more than 2.5, implying that the respondents tend to regard these abilities as quite important for their career progress and growth. This indicates that they highly value the need to deal with challenges and promote effective interpersonal relations.

The research results indicate that resilience, critical thinking and communication serve as relevant competencies of primary school teachers in Morocco. This finding is consistent with the work of Simon Gibbs who has displayed resilience as a better strategy in the management of student behavior and their academic learning. Likewise, the work of Carter etal lends credence to the claim that critical thinking in students leads to better teacher-student interactions which improves their performance. In addition, these results are in line with conclusions made by Meiraline and Caga-anan in their study which stressed the importance of skills as an evaluation factor.

The other skills which include creativity, problem solving, self-management, activity involvement, as well as appreciation of diversity scored higher means averaging 2.2 to 2.4. This implies that the teachers in this case construct more emphasis on these life skills as opposed to for instance, negotiation, empathy and decision making which for them are apparently rated low scoring an average of below 2.2.

The results of the research revealed that there were differences in responses, the mean score across all responses was between 2.1 to 2.3 which is standard. This means that these skills are practically very basic in school. The research findings are like those of Touati who conducted research on soft skills and their role within the teaching learning process and its effect on the relationship between teachers and pupils. Effective communication includes both speaking and listening. It is equally important for fostering other similar skills such as negotiation, empathy, cooperation and participation which ensures performance at work to be a success.

As an additional point, the findings of this study show that educators appreciate the importance of emphasizing the development of critical thinking skills, however, they have problems in knowing what methods they can use to achieve this aim help their pupils to overcome challenges they face (Magali and Bächtold, 2024). But making this a reality of course requires critical thinking, which is rather a complicated process since it entails the acquisition of a certain set of competencies. These include, but are not limited to, the ability to solve problems in an adequate way. About resilience, the respondents noted that this is an important element of being a successful teacher and managing children's behavior satisfactorily.

In the future, training programs should aim to enhance the twelve life skills. This will encourage teachers to engage in activities that strengthen their soft skills and subsequently put those skills into practice in their daily lives, enhancing their well-being and performance, as well as achieving success in the professional.

Moreover, in order to further improve primary school teachers' life skills, it is necessary to conduct more studies which will allow practitioners to articulate their needs and expectations in the future training programs. This calls for an overarching and integrated framework that provides development pathways which are relevant to the needs of each and everyone.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the rapid development of information technology, every teacher should possess a set of life skills to ensure productivity and professional fulfillment. Indeed, teachers must also cultivate these abilities to enhance their instructional efficacy and facilitate student academic advancement. This research aims to evaluate the life skills developed by primary school teachers throughout their professional careers, with a particular focus on those skills that are deemed most crucial to their professional practice.

A quantitative methodology was employed in the form of an electronic questionnaire, which was distributed via email to teachers within the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra regional academy. The response rate was 492, indicating a high level of engagement. The results clearly demonstrate the development of all twelve life skills outlined in the primary cycle curriculum, albeit with minor variations.

Regarding the soft skills that are crucial for effective pedagogy, there is a substantial body of empirical evidence that highlights the importance of resilience, critical thinking, and communication proficiency for educators engaged in professional contexts. It is likewise recommended that future training programs integrate greater emphasis on practical, interactive activities to promote the development of essential life skills.

Similarly, it would be advantageous to incorporate practical, interactive activities into future training courses to facilitate the development of soft skills. It is therefore imperative that these skills are accessible to future teachers in training centers, through the continuous reinforcement of their learning in diverse teaching situations, to guarantee effective teaching and quality learning.

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