

5-15-2024

Higher Education Faculty Perceptions of Soft Skill Gaps in Components of Emotional Intelligence Among Recent Community College Graduates

Bryce Timothy Wiley
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Bryce Wiley

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. John Harrison, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Robert Voelkel, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2024

Abstract

Higher Education Faculty Perceptions of Soft Skill Gaps in Components
of Emotional Intelligence Among Recent Community College Graduates

by

Bryce Wiley

MBA, McKendree University, 2019

BSN, McKendree University, 2018

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

May, 2024

Abstract

The problem addressed by this basic qualitative study was that recent college graduates may lack the soft skills needed for success in the job market. This gap may cause graduates to lack the skills required for employability. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore faculty perceptions of soft skill gaps in components of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—among recent college graduates. The study was conceptualized through the lens of Goleman’s emotional intelligence theoretical framework. Research questions asked college faculty about their views of soft skill deficits among recent college graduates in self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Using a basic qualitative methodology, semistructured one-on-one interviews of 10 college faculty were conducted. Data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis. Six final themes emerged from the interviews: *COVID*, *student success*, *deadlines*, *emotions*, *social interactions*, and *technology*. The answers to the research questions confirmed the soft skill gap that the literature asserted. An analysis of soft skill gaps among recent college graduates could result in potential positive social change by providing information about soft skills that need to be better taught in higher education so that graduates are more employable.

Higher Education Faculty Perceptions of Soft Skill Gaps in Components
of Emotional Intelligence Among Recent Higher Education Graduates

by

Bryce Wiley

MBA, McKendree University, 2019

BSN, McKendree University, 2018

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

May, 2024

Table of Contents

List of Tables	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement	4
Purpose of the Study.....	5
Research Questions.....	6
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Nature of the Study.....	8
Definitions.....	10
Assumptions.....	11
Scope and Delimitations	11
Limitations	12
Significance.....	12
Summary	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review	14
Introduction.....	14
Literature Search Strategy.....	14
Theoretical Framework: Emotional Intelligence	15
Emotional Intelligence Components: Goleman’s View	15
Theorists, Reasons for Development, and Progression	20
What Is Still Unknown.....	26
Other Frameworks Considered	27

Summary	28
Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable	28
Description of Soft Skills.....	28
Current Value of Soft Skills.....	34
Soft Skills Deficit in College Graduates.....	41
Summary and Conclusions	53
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	54
Research Design and Rationale.....	54
Role of the Researcher	57
Methodology.....	58
Participant Selection	59
Instrumentation.....	61
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection.....	62
Data Analysis Plan	63
Trustworthiness	65
Credibility	65
Transferability.....	66
Dependability.....	67
Confirmability.....	67
Ethical Procedures.....	68
Summary	70
Chapter 4: Results	71
Setting.....	72

Data Collection	72
Number of Participants	72
Location, Frequency, and Duration of Interviews	73
Data Analysis	75
Phase 1: Data Familiarization	76
Phase 2: Initial Codes.....	76
Phase 3: Themes.....	77
Phase 4: Reviewing Themes	78
Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes.....	80
Phase 6: Producing the Report	81
Results.....	82
Research Question 1.....	82
Research Question 2.....	86
Research Question 3.....	89
Research Question 4.....	97
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	113
Credibility	113
Transferability.....	114
Dependability.....	115
Confirmability.....	115
Summary	115
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations.....	117
Interpretation of the Findings.....	117

Limitations of the Study.....	123
Recommendations.....	124
Implications.....	125
Potential Impact for Positive Social Change	125
Implications for Theory	126
Implications for Practice	127
Conclusion	128
References.....	131
Appendix A: Interview Introduction.....	148
Appendix B: Interview Protocol.....	149
Appendix C: Member Checking Protocol.....	151
Appendix D: Recruiting Email	152
Appendix E: Site Authorization Email	153
Appendix F: Initial Codes.....	154
Appendix G: Secondary Codes.....	165
Appendix H: Initial Themes.....	168
Appendix I: Final Themes.....	169

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Information	73
Table 2. Interview Duration and Transcript Length	74
Table 3. Theme Progression.....	79

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This study focused on soft skills. Soft skills have been reported as being lacking in new college graduates, which influences their employability (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021; Stewart et al., 2020), and this study sought to determine perspectives on soft skill gaps through personal interviews of relevant higher education faculty. These interviews were used as a means to describe the reasons for this reported deficit in soft skills, and the emotional intelligence theory was used as the theoretical lens.

This problem warranted a study to address the soft skill deficit. This study needed to be conducted because this deficit in college graduates may be negatively impacting the college-educated workforce, as evidenced by lack of preparation for jobs and job duties (Stewart et al., 2020). Additionally, job satisfaction and company outcomes are negatively impacted by an employee soft skill deficit (Dean & East, 2019). The problems outlined in the literature were investigated through the analysis of personal interviews.

This study was needed because with further insight into the soft skill deficit that exists, light may be shed on ideas that would improve workplace soft skills. This study provided perspectives that may be used to potentially close the soft skill gap in recent college graduates via identification of the problem. If the gap is identified, then a plan to close the skills gap may be sought. An increase in soft skills may lead to more qualified college graduates and more productive businesses with improved outcomes. More productive businesses may be assumed with the increase of soft skills because of the reported decrease in productivity and outcomes associated with lack of such soft skills (Dean & East, 2019).

In Chapter 1, the following will be discussed: the background of the problem, the problem of soft skill gaps in components of emotional intelligence, the purpose of the study, research questions, the conceptual framework, the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance. The problem of the soft skill deficit will be introduced, the purpose of the study will be stated, and the research questions involved will be presented. Finally, the definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance sections will provide clarity about the study.

Background

Saunders and Bajjaly (2021) and Stewart et al. (2020) reported that soft skills among recent higher education graduates are lacking. Critical thinking, problem solving, attention to detail, communication, ownership, leadership, and interpersonal skills/teamwork were among the skills reported by employers as lacking among recent college graduates (Payscale, 2016). This lack of soft skill development in new graduates has been considered to be a potential barrier to attaining employment as well as achieving superlative job performance (Stewart et al, 2020).

Dean and East (2019) noted that soft skills such as oral communication, interpersonal skills, and problem solving were lacking among some employees in the logistics industry and that business outcomes such as productivity and safety are negatively affected by this type of deficit. According to Saunders and Bajjaly (2021), employers have reported that soft skills such as communication are lacking. Business schools, for instance, are not teaching these skills thoroughly. Additionally, only a scant

number of studies have examined the perceptions of business faculty on this deficit (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021).

In Saunders's and Bajjaly's (2021) study, most business faculty believed that soft skills are important, with communication ranking the highest. Additionally, most instructors believed that most of the soft skills should be taught. Some soft skills were reported as being taught in the study, while others were reported as being neglected. Furthermore, according to Saunders and Bajjaly's 2022 study, the field of library science also was bereft of soft skills. Regardless of acknowledgement of their importance, soft skills appear to be wanting in the educated workforce (Payscale, 2016; Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021; Stewart et al., 2020).

In view of the soft skills deficit in recent college graduates, soft skill inculcation in higher education (or lack thereof) may be the culprit. Therefore, this lack of soft skills in recent graduates may indicate a shortfall in practice in higher education in developing and teaching student soft skills. Tang (2019), for instance, noted the lack of ability to incorporate soft skills in curricula among higher education lecturers. Saunders and Bajjaly found that at least some soft skills were not being taught in business schools (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021) and recommended the incorporation of soft skills into the library science field (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2022). Likewise, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2018) reported that managers and executives desired that higher education institutions better equip students for the workforce. This issue is vital because the soft skill deficit is detrimental to business productivity and safety in businesses (Dean & East, 2019).

This study was needed because of this soft skill gap present in higher education graduates and its potential detrimental impact on graduates and employers. One role of higher education is to prepare graduates for employment (Tang, 2019). Considering this role, higher education is to inculcate students with soft skills in order to prepare them for the workforce (Tang, 2019).

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study is that higher education graduates may lack the soft skills needed for job acquisition and job performance (Stewart et al., 2020). This is a problem because soft skills are vital across a plethora of fields (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2022).

The relationship between soft skills and employability was a recurring theme in the literature (MacKenzie, 2021; Manan et al., 2021; Marjanovikj-Apostolovski, 2019). Soft skills have to do with relationships between individuals (Gladstone & Brown, 2022). Soft skills include communication, flexibility, leadership, teamwork, responsibility, problem-solving, decisiveness (Gladstone & Brown, 2022), interpersonal relations, and professionalism (Stewart et al., 2016). These skills are essential for succeeding in different professional spheres (Medvedeva et al., 2022). Payscale's 2016 report showed that soft skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, attention to detail, communication, ownership, leadership, and interpersonal skills/teamwork were among the top-ranking skills that employers saw as lacking in new graduates.

Likewise, Stewart et al. (2020) noted that recent college graduates may not possess the soft skills necessary for high-level job performance or even initial job

acquisition in consideration of their 2016 study reporting the superlative confidence of students in soft skill areas employers have said are lacking. Saunders and Bajjaly (2021) also reported employer dissatisfaction in recent college graduates' soft skills and observed the lack of studies addressing faculty perspectives on soft skills in higher education.

Success in business has even been said to be determined by the possession of soft skills, and company outcomes can be negatively affected if a job candidate's skills are not properly assessed (Dean & East, 2019). Effective communication, for instance, is related to organization success, and individuals who lack interpersonal skills tend to be more prone to workplace altercations; additionally, employee job satisfaction can be elevated by supervisors who listen to their employees (Dean & East, 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore faculty perceptions of soft skill gaps in components of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill—among recent college graduates. Faculty perceptions of gaps in graduates' self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill (Goleman, 1998) were explored through interviews. With an understanding of faculty perceptions of students' emotional intelligence, soft skill gaps may be revealed and teaching efforts to fill those gaps informed. Twelve to 15 semistructured one-on-one interviews were sought. The phenomenon of interest in this study was the soft skill deficit in recent college graduates that renders them unprepared for competent job performance (Stewart et al., 2020).

Research Questions

Five research questions guided the study. Research questions were aligned with Goleman's components of emotional intelligence, which are explained in the next section, Theoretical Framework.

- RQ1: How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in self-awareness among recent college graduates?
- RQ2: How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in self-regulation among recent college graduates?
- RQ3: How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in motivation among recent college graduates?
- RQ4: How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in empathy among recent college graduates?
- RQ5: How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in general social skills among recent college graduates?

Theoretical Framework

The soft skill deficit was explored through the lens of Goleman's (1995) emotional intelligence theory. Goleman's theory focuses on the components of emotional intelligence and their effects on the lives of people who possess them. Emotional intelligence encompasses five areas: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill (Goleman, 1998). If these areas are developed in an individual or employee, the person may be said to be emotionally intelligent. However, if these

areas are not developed or underdeveloped, the individual or employee is said to have a low emotional intelligence.

Self-awareness refers to the ability to understand one's emotional state and desires and the way that these affect others (Goleman, 1998). The keynote signs of people who possess this trait are confidence, realistic self-evaluation, and a self-depreciating humor (Goleman, 1998). A person who lacks these qualities is likely not to be classified as one who is self-aware.

Self-regulation is the capacity to control one's anger and to think before acting (Goleman, 1998). Self-regulated individuals will not act immediately in anger but will cautiously ruminate on a subject and act according to sound judgement. However, individuals who are not self-regulated are prone to act on their angry impulses without considering the consequences. Self-regulated individuals are dependable, honest, and comfortable with change and ambiguity (Goleman, 1998).

Motivation is the internal trait of individuals who work tenaciously toward a goal with incentives beyond increase of money or status (Goleman, 1998). Those who possess motivation have a drive to accomplish goals, optimism, and organizational commitment (Goleman, 1998). This internal ambition is the mark of a motivated person.

Empathy is the ability to understand the emotions of others and to respond appropriately to emotional cues (Goleman, 1998). Empathetic people can spot talented employees. Additionally, they have skill in customer service and are adept in speaking with different types of people.

Social skill is proficiency in building rapport with others and finding commonalities (Goleman, 1998). People who have social skill are experts in relationships. These people are persuasive and are good leaders. Socially skilled individuals can relate to others in a conversation and build relationships because of their congeniality.

Emotional intelligence is relevant across fields. Emotional intelligence has been said to be useful in the areas of nursing (Kaiafas, 2021) and education (Butakor et al., 2021). Additionally, student career guidance (Evrensel-Inanc et al., 2022) and exercise (Campos-Uscanga et al., 2022) have been areas in which emotional intelligence is said to be relevant.

Emotional intelligence is an element of the broader category of soft skills. In other words, the qualities that exemplify emotional intelligence may also be considered soft skills (Dean & East, 2019). Furthermore, a correlation between emotional intelligence and soft skills has been shown to exist (Dean & East, 2019). These facts show the compatibility of the study topic and the theory.

In this study, higher education faculty were interviewed to explore their perception of the soft skill deficit in recent higher education graduates. The perception of soft skills and the emotional intelligence of graduates were examined. In probing these faculty perceptions, perhaps a solution may be identified to close the skills gap.

Nature of the Study

This was a basic qualitative study. With its nonobjective focus (Augustine et al., 2019), the qualitative design was ideal for this study focusing on perspectives of higher

education faculty. Subjective opinions were sought from faculty who had experience in higher education.

Qualitative research is required to be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In quantitative research articles, Korstjens and Moser (2018) noted that data analysis extends throughout the writing process. One marker of qualitative writing, they found, is that it is narrative. Additionally, they noted that qualitative research articles tend to be longer than quantitative articles, and that novelty, truth, and relevance are prized in qualitative writing.

Interviews were used to collect the perspectives of individual faculty qualified to remark on the soft skills gap in recent college graduates. The subjectivity factor is what made the basic qualitative design ideal for this study. The design involves describing phenomena as well as reflecting on this description (Freshwater, 2020). This study entailed describing what was observed in college faculty interviews. Interviews were conducted in order to collect data regarding the reasons for the soft skill deficit in recent higher education graduates. Because a gap has been shown in the soft skills required to get a job or to perform a job well among college graduates (Stewart, et al., 2020), faculty perceptions were explored using interviews.

The soft skill requirements for job acquisition are not meeting the necessary criteria among college graduates in today's world (Stewart et al., 2020). College faculty are in an ideal position to comment on this phenomenon of interest. Perhaps these interviews will shed light on the problem that employers are now facing.

The basic qualitative methodology aligns with the problem, purpose, and research questions because they involve subjective opinions about higher education. The study was conducted using semistructured interviews of qualified individuals. Interviews allow researchers to gather information using the views of chosen individuals.

In the case of this study, the individuals were chosen who had experience in working with college students. For those experienced with college students, college faculty were interviewed. The faculty perspectives on the soft skill deficit should facilitate understanding of the problem.

After interviews with the appropriate individuals, the responses were reviewed for common themes. Additionally, similar responses among the individuals were given special attention. The goal of using this method was to assist in comprehension of the phenomena of interest, the lack of soft skills in recent graduates.

Definitions

Cultural competence: Cultural competence is the capacity to communicate effectively and to cooperate across cultural lines (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021).

Hard skills: Hard skills are skills that are specific to a profession (Gladstone & Brown, 2022).

Reflective practice: Reflective practice is inspecting one's own work for the purpose of refining it (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021).

Soft skills/employability skills: Soft skills, or employability skills, are skills that serve the purpose of influencing and building trust (Gladstone & Brown, 2022).

Assumptions

Several assumptions existed in this study. One assumption was that the methodology and design were adequate for addressing the problem at hand. Another assumption was that the sample size was sufficient. Additionally, the assumption was made that the interviewees understood the terminology being used, as important terms were defined. Finally, it was assumed that the participants provided honest feedback.

These assumptions were necessary in the context of the study because a methodology and design that aligned well with the topic being studied were chosen. Additionally, the sample size was large enough to study the problem but small enough to be manageable. The sample size, therefore, provided a desirable balance for this particular study.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was delimited to college faculty in the Midwest. Faculty were chosen because they worked with college students on a daily basis. The aim of the research questions was selected intentionally and constituted a delimitation. The research questions were delimited to align with Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence. Other models of emotional intelligence exist but were not selected for the study (Bar-On, 1997; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Additionally, because of the small sample size, the results of the study may not be transferrable to all higher education faculty, as the sample chosen may not reflect the general population. Findings may, therefore, not be transferrable to all faculty.

Limitations

Limitations existed in this study, including transferability and dependability. Because of the delimitation of only utilizing faculty in the Midwest, the results may not be transferrable to the rest of the United States or across the globe. Additionally, because interviews elicited subjective views from a set of individuals, these views may not have been consistently truthful or correct.

Participant biases related to individual views of the purpose and nature of education may have been present. The participants may have had individual experiences that influenced their responses. The individuals may have had their own views of soft skills in higher education and the workforce that were shaped by their individual experiences and are not necessarily representative of the truth of the situation in every case. Additionally, my own views of education may have presented a bias.

The limitations were offset by the wide range of viewpoints in the study, as the individuals interviewed taught different courses and had different experiences. The experience and broad views represented in the study helped to round out the information gathered. In other words, a wide range of ideas was collected from individuals among disciplines in order to mitigate the inherent limitations of the study.

Significance

This study is significant in that in it, a gap in practice was addressed as revealed in literature, and it has the potential for social change through the elucidation of the concept of employability skills (soft skills). The soft skill deficit in recent higher

education graduates was explored through interviews. These interviews shed light on the deficit.

Higher education institution leaders may be willing to adjust practices to close this gap. If this gap is closed, improvement may be noticed in workforce productivity and safety. In other words, employers may be given a more effective workforce as a result of closing this gap. The closing of this gap may result in less unemployment in recent higher education graduates and more business productivity. More business productivity and more job satisfaction for employees, among other advantages, may occur as the result of this study.

Summary

This qualitative descriptive study was focused on obtaining information about the soft skill deficit as it relates to higher education graduates. It addressed the problem of the soft skills deficit through semistructured interviews with college faculty. Questions were asked of individuals who were considered to be knowledgeable on this topic. Questions were guided by Goleman's emotional intelligence framework. Answers were sought to questions about soft skills and employment that may be beneficial to understanding the present soft skill deficit. A basic qualitative design was the approach taken, though certain study limitations existed with the use of a qualitative approach. Chapter 2 will provide a discussion of the framework used to ground the study as well as a review of the literature on the topic of soft skill deficits.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The problem addressed in this study is that higher education graduates often lack the soft skills needed for job acquisition and job performance (Stewart et al., 2020). This is a problem because soft skills are vital across a plethora of fields (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2022). In addition to functioning as a barrier to employment, this soft skills deficit has been counted as an obstruction in performing exceptionally on the job (Stewart et al., 2020).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore faculty perceptions of soft skill gaps in components of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—among recent college graduates. This chapter will provide a review of the literature related to the deficit of soft skills in recent college graduates. In this chapter, the literature search strategy will be explained, the theoretical framework will be outlined, and an overview of the current literature on the topic of the soft skill deficit will be presented.

Literature Search Strategy

The online Walden Library was utilized to obtain current, peer-reviewed literature related to the problem of the soft skills deficit. ERIC, EBSCO, Dissertations and Theses at Walden University, ScienceDirect, Directory of Open Access Journals, Sage Journals, and ProQuest were utilized through the Walden Library. The majority of the sources utilized were published from 2017–2022 and were peer-reviewed. The key words searched were *soft skills*, *emotional intelligence*, and *higher education*.

Theoretical Framework: Emotional Intelligence

This study used Daniel Goleman's 1995 theory of emotional intelligence as a framework. Emotional intelligence aligns well with the idea of soft skills due to the interrelatedness of concepts (Walton, 2021). Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence involves ideas common to both his 1995 theory and the current concept of soft skills (Walton, 2021). Therefore, the theory was compatible with this study. In this section, five topics will be addressed: the components of the theory, the theorist and reasons for development, how the theory has changed, what is still unknown, and other frameworks considered and why they were not chosen for this study.

Emotional Intelligence Components: Goleman's View

While there is no universally recognized definition of emotional intelligence (Qi Zhang et al., 2022), Daniel Goleman's proposal of the idea is in view in this study. Goleman's view is essentially the same as that of Mayer et al. (1990), as will be noted later. Daniel Goleman proposed his theory of emotional intelligence in his 1995 seminal work entitled *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. A republication of the work (the version used in this study) occurred in 1997. Daniel Goleman (1998) stated that emotional intelligence consists of five capacities: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. Goleman borrowed this categorization from the psychologist Peter Salovey, who learned the basic concepts from another psychologist, Robert Sternberg. Proficiency in these areas makes an individual emotionally intelligent in Goleman's view. In this section, Goleman's theory will be explained as he proposed it, and his views will be corroborated with other authors.

Self-awareness is a trait characterized by understanding oneself (Goleman, 1997).

According to Goleman, self-awareness includes being aware on one's emotions and recognizing feelings in the present. Goleman's concept of self-awareness bears semblance to the category of perceiving emotion, proposed by Mayer et al. (2016). Individuals are said to perceive emotions when they are able to identify deceptive emotions, express emotions well, and perceive emotions in others based upon facial expressions and other behavioral cues (Mayer et al., 2016). Goleman (1997) wrote that self-awareness is the keystone of the entire concept of emotional intelligence and that monitoring one's emotions is crucial in the understanding of self.

Goleman (1997) noted that if individuals are unaware of their feelings, they are more likely to be blindly guided by them. Therefore, a clear conception of one's own emotions is vital in the arena of emotional intelligence because without this perception, individuals are not in control of these emotions; rather, the emotions are, in some sense, in control of the individuals, whether this concept is realized by the individuals or not. Individuals who are emotionally perceptive are able to know what constitutes an appropriate expression of emotion and what is not appropriate in social contexts (Mayer et al., 2016).

In life decisions such as choosing a spouse or a job, being aware of one's emotions is crucial because individuals who have understanding of emotions are better equipped to direct their decisions with insight and well-adjusted judgement; people who know how they feel know what decisions they would like to make (Goleman, 1997). Thus, for Goleman, being aware of one's emotions is a means by which good decisions

are made. These good decisions are a product of the emotional perception that emotionally intelligent individuals possess, including perception of appropriate expression of emotion in others (Mayer et al., 2016).

One step beyond self-awareness lies self-regulation or managing emotions. Self-regulation refers to activities such as placating oneself in times of distress, dismissing anxiety in times of fear, changing one's outlook when life's situations appear bleak, and changing one's feelings of irritability in situations of annoyance (Goleman, 1997). In essence, the process involves manipulating one's own emotions to a specific and productive end (Mayer et al., 2016). These competencies involve reining in emotions to the appropriate levels (Goleman, 1997).

This second competency is dependent upon proficiency in the first competency (Goleman, 1997). In other words, self-regulation is contingent on self-awareness. Engaging in this regulatory process builds upon the foundation of being aware of one's emotions. Goleman believed that being able to manage one's emotions is a critical skill in the lives of individuals, and success or failure in this arena determines how people respond to life's upsets (Goleman, 1997). The regulatory process is essentially one of utilizing one's own emotions in a productive, rather than a counterproductive, manner (Mayer et al., 2016). In this way, individuals are not controlled by their emotions (Goleman, 1997).

Additionally, according to Goleman (1997), a person's ability to rein in emotions determines the direction of relationships and employment. Regulating emotions may involve practices such as taking time away from an individual with whom one is angry to

avoid unchecked rage from occurring or avoid unproductive worrying. Distraction from negative feelings is another tactic that Goleman made note of. Monitoring one's emotions is essential to this category because it allows individuals to determine whether their emotional responses are appropriate or inappropriate, allowing them to adjust accordingly (Mayer et al., 2016).

Motivation refers to engaging in stimulating oneself to do what one desires to do (Goleman, 1997). This skill is necessary for being creative, mastering a skill, and even paying attention. It involves giving attention to a single task with a high level of concentration and no distraction. When people motivate themselves to perform an activity, their attention is undivided and set on the duty being performed in a trance-like focus, blocking out distractions that may surround the individual (Goleman, 1997).

In order to achieve a goal, one must be motivated to perform tasks necessary in achieving that goal (Goleman, 1997). Part of this process involves delaying gratification and curbing impulsive behavior. Instant gratification and lack of impulse control are deadly to goal completion. When a goal is being worked toward, delaying pleasure and curbing momentary desires can help an individual achieve a goal (Goleman, 1997). Mayer et al. (2016) utilized the category of facilitating thought using emotion to express a similar view, one that states that individuals may leverage their emotions to be used usefully toward desired ends; part of this facilitation is regulating emotions such as mood swings that could hinder proper emotional balance.

Some people have the ability to concentrate to a degree that enables them to block out all distractions and to be fully engaged in whatever is being accomplished at the

moment (Goleman, 1997). In other words, these individuals are not thinking of the results of the work they are performing. They are not even thinking about how they are enjoying the work they are performing. Rather, they are focused on the work itself in an attentive way that is fulfilling and absorbing. This state of mind is known as being in a “flow.” People who are able to achieve this “flow” are incredibly productive in their respective tasks (Goleman, 1997). The productive harnessing of emotions may be used for productive tasks such as aiding in memory and decisions (Mayer et al., 2016).

Empathy is the skill of recognizing emotions in others (Goleman, 1997). This ability, like self-regulation, has as its foundation the competency of self-awareness. Thus, being aware of others’ emotions depends on the ability to perceive one’s own emotions. The two competencies are, therefore, bound together in application (Goleman, 1997). Emotions, therefore, can be used to relate to the experiences of others (Mayer et al., 2016).

Goleman (1997) categorized empathy as a “people skill.” The ability to perceive what others are feeling gives one an advantage in navigating social situations. Because empathetic people are able to determine what others desire emotionally in a conversation, they are able to engage well with others. Empathetic people know what people want and need emotionally, and they are able to give what is desired (Goleman, 1997).

Because empathetic people are acutely aware of inconspicuous social cues that others may miss, they tend to be well-suited for vocations that require people skills such as teaching, management, and sales (Goleman, 1997). Empathetic people tend to be altruistic, focusing their attention on the needs of others. Conversely, the lack of empathy

and understanding social cues has a deleterious effect on a person's social interactions and relationships (Goleman, 1997).

Although the category of empathy involves people skills, the fifth category of emotional intelligence, social skill (handling relationships), also lies in a similar arena (Goleman, 1997). Goleman wrote that handling relationships is the art of navigating the emotions of others. This skill set is held by those who are good leaders, effective in conversation, and well-liked by others (Goleman, 1997). The social category is not presented as a separate category in the work of Mayer et al. (2016). However, the authors did present the concept of recognizing emotions in others and regulating those emotions.

People who possess social skills can navigate social situations flawlessly (Goleman, 1997). They are charming and likeable. They know what to say and when to say it. Their ability to interact effortlessly and smoothly with people gives them the necessary advantages for careers that require interpersonal skills (Goleman, 1997).

People are unique in their own levels of aptitude in each of these categories (Goleman, 1997). Some may be adept in one area and inept in another area. Goleman wrote that these skills are not static and may, therefore, be improved upon through practice. A person who lacks emotional intelligence may become capable through building positive habits (Goleman, 1997).

Theorists, Reasons for Development, and Progression

In the 1920s and 1930s, psychologist E. L. Thorndike wrote in *Harper's Magazine* that social relations (a facet of emotional intelligence) are part of IQ (Goleman, 1997). Leeper (1948, as cited in Mayer et al., 1990) believed that emotions may be a part

of intelligence and logical thought processes. Utilizing Leeper's view, Mayer et al. (1990) saw emotional intelligence as the ability to understand emotions in oneself and others, to respond appropriately, and to manage emotions in such ways as to live a productive life. The latter authors recognized emotional intelligence to be competencies that can be measured by tasks and recognized that these skills can be learned. They suggested that an emotionally unintelligent person may be an individual whom others find repulsive due to their boring disposition and inability to gauge emotions appropriately.

However, Mayer et al. (1990) also believed that low emotional intelligence may be able to be raised to acceptable levels, improving the social and emotional lives of those individuals who suffer with this problem. The researchers recognized the self-perception aspect of emotional intelligence, referring to it as a type of introspection. In summary, for Mayer et al. (1990), emotional intelligence has to do with perceiving one's own emotions along with the emotions of others, as well as reacting appropriately in social situations with the emotional information relayed.

A psychologist from Yale, Robert Sternberg, concluded from his research that social intelligence is part of what makes a person perform well in life and is separate from academic abilities (Sternberg, 1985, as cited in Goleman, 1997). Additionally, Sternberg believed that intelligence had to do with adaptability to one's surroundings (Sternberg & Detterman, 1986, as cited in Sternberg et al., 2021). Sternberg, along with Howard Gardner, believed that gifted children could be identified in ways other than IQ tests (Gardner, 1983, as cited in Sternberg, 2015; Sternberg & Davidson, 2005, as cited in

Sternberg, 2015). Both psychologists and neuroscientists presented views of human emotions that drove Goleman's ideas on emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1997). Sternberg went on to write of emotional intelligence after Goleman developed the full theory, saying that individuals with a high emotional intelligence can manage their relationships well and may look up to others as role models (Sternberg, 1996, as cited in Usta & Sahin, 2022).

Joseph LeDoux, a neuroscientist at the Center for Neural Science at New York University, first recognized the emotional processes of the amygdala in the brain (Goleman, 1997). LeDoux performed research on the amygdala, including the concept of fear response in the brain (Rodrigues et al., 2004). LeDoux (1993, as cited in Goleman, 1997) produced evidence that the amygdala could take over while the rational part of the brain (neocortex) still navigated its decision-making processes. In other words, the emotional part of the brain operates more quickly than the rational part of the brain (Goleman, 1997). Thus, Goleman's takeaways from this prior research focused on the important role of emotions on decision-making.

Dr. Antonio Damasio, a University of Iowa College of Medicine neurologist, also provided groundwork for Goleman's theory in his research on the brain's amygdala. Damasio (1994, as cited in Goleman, 1997) found that individuals with prefrontal-amygdala circuit damage lacked emotional capacities while showing no decrease in IQ. Damasio stated that these patients had lost their emotional learning and had made bad decisions regardless of their intellect. This idea of an emotional brain/rational brain divide is a key influence in the development of the emotional intelligence theory

(Goleman, 1997). Damasio went on to perform research on the role of the amygdala in emotion, particularly the fear response (Adolphs et al., 2011).

Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray, in their book *The Bell Curve* (1994, as cited in Goleman, 1997), noted that the importance of IQ in career success is overshadowed by the many other individual attributes that people possess. Notably, Herrnstein and Murray (1996, as cited in Salamone, 2021) believed that intelligence was inherited. Goleman himself, however, considered emotional intelligence to be a subset of these other characteristics, and this idea is a guiding focus of his seminal work (Goleman, 1997).

Additionally, Howard Gardner, Harvard School of Education psychologist, believed that education should help students achieve success in areas where they show individual aptitude; Gardner, who did not believe that IQ tests accurately represent intelligence, outlined seven areas of intelligences in his book entitled *Frames of Mind* (1983, as cited in Goleman, 1997). Among Gardner's categorizations was that of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence. Gardner defined interpersonal intelligence as the capacity to understand others, whereas intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to understand oneself and to operate proficiently from that knowledge (Gardner, 1983, as cited in Goleman, 1997; Sheoran, 2019). Gardner emphasized the importance of interpersonal intelligence, explaining that it can determine who works for whom (at times outranking IQ) and whether people make good life decisions or bad life decisions. Gardner also developed the theory of multiple intelligences, which states that individuals possess aptitudes in differing areas (Gardner, 1983/2011, as cited in Gardner, 2017).

Gardner's work spans decades, and he stated that he agreed with fellow researchers such as Sternberg (1984) that scholastic intelligence is not the sole measure of intelligence (Gardner, 2017).

Peter Salovey, a Yale psychologist, built on Gardner's understanding, focusing on ways in which people can incorporate intellect into their emotions (Goleman, 1997). Perhaps Salovey had the largest impact on Goleman with respect to organizing the components of the theory, as it was Salovey who organized the categorizations that Goleman used in his emotional intelligence theory: knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships (Goleman, 1997). Salovey espoused a view of the relationship of emotions and intellect nearly identical to Goleman's view. In fact, Salovey, along with other men, developed a measurement tool for emotional intelligence that has been used in recent years to measure emotional intelligence in bipolar disorder (Varo, 2019) known as the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (Mayer et al., 2003). These authors emphasized emotions working properly in an individual in such a way as to allow him or her to manage emotions and use them productively in life (Goleman, 1997).

Additionally, Salovey and Mayer (1990, as cited in Mayer et al., 2016) asserted that emotional intelligence may differ among individuals, citing the areas of managing feelings and discerning emotions in others. Salovey and Mayer (1997, as cited in Mayer et al., 2016) stated that emotionally intelligent people can understand and manage their own emotions and can interact with others well based on their own emotions and their perceptions of others' emotions. Booms et al. (2016) classified emotional intelligence as

a quality of one category of person-focused leader. Emotional intelligence has been defended as necessary for success even in the field of construction (Love et al., 2011).

Daniel Goleman developed the theory of emotional intelligence. In his 1995 bestselling book entitled *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ*, he introduced the theory and his reason for creating it. He explained his own experience that sparked his interest and the psychologists who laid the groundwork for the theory he developed.

The preface to Goleman's seminal work began with a quotation from Aristotle musing of the difficulty of focusing one's anger on the correct individual, at the correct time, to the correct degree, for the correct purpose, and in the correct way. Much of Goleman's work on emotional intelligence involved this idea in exploring how people can be controlled by their emotions and can control their emotions (Goleman, 1997).

Also in the preface, Goleman gave his readers some insight into what motivated him to research human emotions and to develop a theory. He recalled an experience nearly twenty years prior to authoring the book in which a New York City bus driver influenced the passengers' emotions on an uncomfortably hot summer afternoon. The driver's optimism and winsomeness were contagious. Despite the irritability of the passengers as they entered the bus, their exit was met with a returned smile to the driver. This social interaction spawned the author to investigate the emotional lives of individuals.

Until just before the turn of the 21st century, IQ was regarded as paramount, but more attention was given to the emotional side of intelligence thereafter (Woodard,

2018). After a quarter-century, Goleman's theory is still being utilized. It has stood the test of time, as contemporary researchers are still utilizing the theory. Emotional intelligence has recently been said to be of value in assisting college students in their career paths (Evrensel-Inanc et al., 2022). Another example of its use would be a study in which exercise in natural spaces among men and women and its correlation to emotional intelligence (Campos-Uscanga et al., 2022).

Additionally, Kaiafas (2021) noted its importance among Christian nurse educators and students. In fact, it has even been recommended for school curricula for teacher training (Butakor, et al., 2021). Its overlap with soft skills is evident (Walton, 2021), and over the past few years, the need for emotional intelligence has been said to be increasing due to the benefits afforded to individuals (Arteaga-Cedeño et al., 2022).

The relationship between soft skills and emotional intelligence can be viewed in different ways. A correlation exists between high emotional intelligence and soft skill proficiency (Dean & East, 2019). In fact, emotional intelligence has been said to represent a subset of particular soft skills (Dean & East, 2019). Kaiafas (2021), however, used the terms synonymously, referencing the "soft skills of emotional intelligence" (para. 1). In summary, the link between emotional intelligence and soft skills has been noted.

What Is Still Unknown

While Goleman (1997) did not articulate that a facet of emotional intelligence is left unknown, he did express a concern for the state of the United States educational system in the mid-1990s. He stated that children were not being taught emotional

intelligence. He referenced the abundance of violence among teenagers. He believed that inculcating emotional intelligence into the youth of the United States will help to alleviate the problem. In Goleman's mind, it was not so much a matter of not knowing what to do, but rather a not doing what he believed should be done.

Other Frameworks Considered

Other frameworks were considered for this study. Among them were the Mazirow's transformative learning theory, Akers' social learning theory, and Bandura's social learning theory. All three theories would have worked for studying soft skills, but they did not fit as closely as the emotional intelligence theory. The emotional intelligence theory was the best fit, as it is directly connected to soft skills (Walton, 2021).

Mezirow's theory was one of the options. First, Mezirow's theory, which focuses on the transformation of the understanding via communication in the learning process (Mezirow, 1998), was too broad and was not the best lens through which to look at soft skills learning. Goleman's theory fit much more closely with soft skills training and provided a lens through which to view this process.

Additionally, Akers's theory would have worked for this study because it seeks to explain the behavior of individuals. However, Akers's primary focus was on criminology and deviant behavior (Akers, 1973). While it could have been used more broadly for this study, it would not have been the optimal lens through which to look at soft skills training.

Finally, Bandura's theory has all of the benefits of Akers's theory without the specific focus on deviant and criminal behavior. However, Bandura's focus was primarily

on the behavior and development of children rather than adults (Bandura, 1963). While Bandura could have been used broadly, the theory would not provide the close fit that the emotional intelligence theory provides.

Summary

Goleman's emotional intelligence theory is based on five competencies in the individual. If these competencies are present, the person is said to be emotionally intelligent. If these competencies are absent, the person is said not to be emotionally intelligent. This study surrounding the soft skill deficit in college graduates was viewed through the lens of the emotional intelligence theory. Next, the current, peer-reviewed literature on the topic of soft skills will be presented.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

This section will consist of a review of the literature pertaining to soft skills and their deficit in college graduates. Three topics will be expounded. This section comprises the following: a description of soft skills, the current value of soft skills, and the soft skills deficit in college graduates.

Description of Soft Skills

In this section, the peer-reviewed journals on the topic of soft skills will be presented. The articles reviewed were published primarily from 2017 to 2022. Soft skills will be described, along with their history and development. Additionally, different categories of soft skills will be examined. The following three topics will be covered in this section: the general principles related to soft skills, the history of soft skills, and the categories of soft skills.

Soft Skills: General Principles

Soft skills involve people (Smith et al., 2021). At the surface, they are competencies possessed by individuals (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021). The term of soft skills has been used as a synonym for interpersonal skills (e.g. communication and teamwork) and intrapersonal skills (e.g. flexibility and reflectiveness) (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021). These types of skills have to do with relationships among people; additionally, interactions among individuals are the area in which soft skills are evident (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021; Smith et al., 2021).

This type of skill set goes beyond the usual set of skills that individuals learn for particular tasks. Soft skills require more than knowledge of certain facts. In fact, soft skills are competencies that go beyond book knowledge (Gladstone & Brown, 2022). They can be difficult to recognize and to define, and they tend bear a sense of mystery (Bhagra & Sharma, 2018; Continisio et al., 2021; Gladstone & Brown, 2022). Although they are enigmatic, soft skills have their uses. Functionally, these skills act as the means by which individuals understand the intentions of others and respond accordingly, providing correct and constructive feedback (Gladstone & Brown, 2022). In this way, soft skills are related to emotional intelligence (Walton, 2021), a skill set that largely overlaps that of soft skills.

When viewing the question of what a soft skill entails, one may juxtapose the soft skill with the hard skill. Hard skills refer to those aptitudes that are required for a profession (Continisio, 2021; Gladstone & Brown, 2022) or for adequate academic performance as measured by grades (Betti et al., 2022). According to Gladstone and

Brown, these skills are those which are taught to students or to new employees that are to be used as the means by which an employee completes the assigned work. According to Gladstone and Brown, hard skills related to particular professions are the cornerstones to those professions; without hard skills, the workforce would not be able to function at all. In essence, hard skills involve objective measures that provide feedback on one's performance (Betti, et al, 2021).

Gladstone and Brown (2022) wrote of the peculiarities of hard skills. First, hard skills must be learned; although some students may grasp professional skills more readily than others, hard skills are not innate. Rather, Gladstone and Brown insist that they must be acquired through disciplined study. While Gladstone and Brown identified hard skill learning as the process by which the workforce engages its mental or physical faculties to learn various trades, professions, or tasks, Betti et al. (2021) presented academic performance as an indication of hard skill possession and grades as a measure of these skills. No true disagreement exists, as hard skills are simply the tools that students (Betti et al. (2021) and employees (Gladstone & Brown, 2022) must use to properly accomplish tasks when in the classroom (Betti et al., 2021) or on the workforce (Continisio et al., 2021; Gladstone & Brown, 2022).

The soft skill/hard skill dichotomy allows individuals to look at the learning process of each in relation to the other (Betti et al., 2021; Gladstone & Brown, 2022). If a soft skill is presented as the antithesis of a hard skill, and hard skills must be learned and are never innate, then one may reasonably ask if the difference in hard and soft skills lies

in whether the skill is said to be intrinsic or extrinsic (Gladstone & Brown, 2022).

However, the authors indicated that this dichotomy is overly simplistic.

While soft skills tend toward the innate, the differences in hard and soft skills go beyond this distinction. More qualifications exist in the distinctions between hard and soft skills that one may study (Betti et al., 2021; Gladstone & Brown, 2022). For instance, hard skills are quantifiable, whereas soft skills tend to be nebulous in nature (Continisio et al., 2021; Gladstone & Brown, 2022). Soft and hard skills possess similarities as well, as both are competencies possessed by an individual that benefit him or her in the workplace (Collins, 2021; Continisio, 2021; Gladstone & Brown, 2022). Additionally, both skill sets are teachable (Continisio, 2021; Rao, 2018). Although soft skills are teachable (Continisio, 2021), Rao noted that teaching them can present more difficulties than teaching hard skills.

Soft skills may be explained further from the distinction in skill sets. Soft skills, a set of behavioral skills (Rao, 2018), may be further explained in relation to their counterpart, hard skills. Hard skills tend to determine what one communicates, whereas soft skills tend to determine how one communicates (Rao, 2018). For instance, soft skills may include using inoffensive euphemisms when communicating potentially offensive information (Roa, 2018). In essence, Roa noted that soft skills can refer to the ability to present one's hard skills in a refined and genteel manner. Additionally, soft skills are largely transferrable among different career choices (Smith et al, 2021). Therefore, soft skills can determine one's success in a career (Chakraborty, 2022) and in life (Smith et al., 2021).

Soft skills present challenges in that they tend to be difficult to teach and that they are treated trivially (Martin, 2019; Rao, 2018). Additionally soft skills are more difficult and more time-consuming to teach than hard skills (Rao, 2018). In fact, the complicated nature of teaching soft skills may lie in the challenge of making these skills relevant and realistic (Martin, 2019). Additionally, soft skills can be dismissed as unimportant (Rao, 2018).

Measurement is another aspect that adds to the intricacy of soft skill inculcation (Rao, 2018). Although measuring soft skills is difficult (Rao, 2018) when compared to hard skills (Stewart et al., 2020), these skills can be measured (Abbott, 2019, p. 245). For instance, Jardim et al. (2022) devised a measuring tool for soft skills, and Morozova et al. (2022) utilized diagnostic techniques to measure these skills. These two examples demonstrate that though soft skills tend to be difficult to measure, measuring them has been attempted.

Soft skills are thought to be influenced by genetic and environmental factors (Rao, 2018). According to Rao, the environmental aspect allows for the learning of soft skills. Rao wrote that soft skills can be learned by practice, reading, activity, training, and observation. Talents, aptitudes, and understanding can be gained through soft skills training, but Rao believed that soft skills are truly learned when utilized in interpersonal communication, and this interpersonal communication is key to producing results. This active learning approach is a common theme in the literature (Martin, 2019; Rao, 2018; Saeger et al. 2019; Stewart et al., 2020). Furthermore, Rao's view was that trial and error

is the way in which soft skills are honed in a student. Additionally, for Rao, because soft skills are behavioral skills, they are best learned by rehearsing behavior.

Soft Skill History

Charles Mann produced research in 1918 on the necessity of teaching soft skills to university students and workers (Mann, 1918, p. 107, as cited in Ramnanan, 2022). In 1936, Dale Carnegie wrote of the potential of individuals with soft skills to earn a large salary (Woodard, 2018, p. 40). In 1950, the American Society for Engineering Education published *Speaking Can Be Easy...For Engineers too* (Woodard, 2018). By 1972, in a Texas conference, the U.S. Continental Army Command identified soft skills as those aptitudes relating to people and paperwork (Whitmore & Fry, 1972. as cited in Woodard, 2018. p. 41). This was the first known use of the term.

With IQ being emphasized over emotional intelligence until the mid-1990s (Goleman, 1997; Woodard, 2018), the related concept of soft skills was not given sustained credence until just before the millennium (Woodard, 2018). However, since that time, researchers have grown to take these skills related to human relationships seriously (Woodard, 2018). Recognizing the importance of soft skills, universities have implemented soft skills training into their curricula in recent years (Betti et al., 2022).

Soft Skill Categories

Soft skills have been divided into multiple categories. Different authors have presented different categories. However, a significant overlap exists among the categories listed among most authors who have written on the topic. The following list of soft skills include those typically found in the literature: critical thinking, problem solving, attention

to detail, communication, ownership, leadership, and interpersonal skills, teamwork (Payscale, 2016), listening skills, presentation skills, collaborative skills, time-management skills, decision-making skills, etiquette, professionalism, creativity, analytical thinking, emotional intelligence, goal-setting, entrepreneurial skills, negotiation skills (Rao, 2018), and writing (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021).

These categories have to do with one's own internal desires, motivations, and actions as well as one's desires, motivations, and actions as they relate to interpersonal communication (Rao, 2018; Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021; Thompson et al., 2020). In other words, interpersonal communication as well as intrapersonal communication are represented in the collective lists of soft skill competencies (Rao, 2018; Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021; Thompson et al., 2020). Again, one may notice the significant overlap in the idea of soft skills with the theory of emotional intelligence (Dean & East, 2019; Walton, 2021). Indeed, they are overlapping and exceedingly similar in character, as they both relate to understanding the self and others and reacting accordingly (Rao, 2018; Walton, 2021).

The term of *soft skills* has been defined and explained, the history of the idea was laid out, and the categories of soft skills have been listed. Soft skills, being nontechnical skills, encompass the area of social engagement and employability (Continisio et al., 2021). Next, the benefits of soft skills will be explored.

Current Value of Soft Skills

Soft skills have been recognized to afford benefits for those who possess them (Chakraborty, 2022; Smith et al., 2021). Recognition of the benefits of these skills have

been outlined in the literature on the topic (Dean & East, 2019; Smith et al., 2021). This section will focus on the ways in which soft skills provide advantages for those who are adept in their usage. Four sections that will be presented are: professional recognition of soft skills, soft skills in relationships, and soft skills in employment.

Professional Recognition of Soft Skills

Soft skills have been recognized as important because of their benefits in the several areas. Soft skills are helpful in in the workplace (Collins, 2021; Dean & East, 2019; Grimmer, 2021; Smith et al., 2021). Many fields of employment require soft skills for success (Collins, 2021; Dean & East, 2019; Saunders & Bajjaly, 2022), and workplace success depends upon these skills (MacDermott & Ortiz, 2017; Chakraborty, 2022). The essential need of soft skills among college students is seen in the observation that academic tenacity and achievement are correlated with these types of skills (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021).

Soft skills are also needed in the professional sphere (Grimmer, 2021). Business continuity leadership, emergency management (Gladstone & Brown, 2022), healthcare (Continisio et al., 2021; Seager et al., 2019; Sherine et al., 2021), library science (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2022), education (Kniaz & Chukhno, 2021; Patil, 2021) engineering (Geraedts et al., 2022), logistics (Dean & East, 2019), and property management/polytechnics (Ismail, 2022) are some of the fields in which soft skills are beneficial. Soft skills are not only of benefit but are considered to be vital and necessary in some fields such as emergency management and business continuity leadership in which employees must possess soft skills (Gladstone & Brown, 2022). Furthermore, soft

skills have also been shown to have affected teacher professional development during the COVID-19 pandemic (Segura et al., 2022). Soft skills allow graduates to be more fully prepared for a career in the workforce (Chakraborty, 2022; Smith et al., 2021).

Soft skills have been said to be indispensable for success in professional and private life and have even been encouraged to be inculcated through training from a young age (Chakraborty, 2022). Again, the development of emotional intelligence is in view (Goleman, 1997). Soft skills may be taught to children from a young age (Chakraborty, 2022), and this skill set would include ways to manage emotions and to recognize emotions in others, responding appropriately and productively (Goleman, 1997).

In recent years, universities have recognized the importance of soft skills as evidenced by the incorporation of these skills into curricula (Betti et al., 2022). Soft skills to be taught to students include communication skills, listening skills, presentation skills, collaborative skills, time-management skills, decision-making skills, etiquette, professionalism, creativity, analytical thinking, emotional intelligence, goal setting, entrepreneurial skills, and negotiation skills (Rao, 2018). Because of the potential benefits of soft skills in personal (Goleman, 1997) and professional life (Chakraborty, 2022; Smith et al., 2021), soft skills have been recognized as a benefit for the college student (Betti et al., 2022; Geraedts et al., 2022). Critical thinking, in particular, is a soft skill that would profit students taking general education courses (Thonney & Montgomery, 2019). Additionally, higher education institutions function to develop

emotional intelligence (Kastberg et al., 2020), and the relatedness of emotional intelligence and soft skills has been noted (Walton, 2021).

The acknowledgement of these ideas in the literature demonstrates the recognition of the value of such skills in higher education (Geraedts et al., 2022; Kastberg et al., 2020; Thonney & Montgomery, 2019) as well as in the workforce (Chakraborty, 2022; Grimmer, 2021; Smith et al., 2021). The value of soft skills has been recognized, and a multitude of ideas for developing these skills have been presented in the literature (Martin, 2019; Saeger et al., 2019). One technique for promoting soft skills, active learning, also known as experiential learning, in which students are engaged in the process of gaining knowledge, is a recurring theme in the literature (Martin, 2019; Rao, 2018; Saeger et al., 2019).

Leadership mentoring plays a crucial role in teaching individuals to adapt to their environments (Barnes & Gearin, 2022). In order to help business students develop soft skills, an active learning approach may be used rather than the lecture method of teaching (Martin, 2019). In this way, active and experiential learning can be utilized to inculcate soft skills (Rao, 2018).

Active learning is a theme for Rao (2018), and themes related to emotional intelligence are brought to light (Goleman, 1997), although the connection is not made directly by the author. Rao (2018) noted that traveling and communicating with others in foreign languages are methods that may be employed to train one in learning soft skills. Soft skills workshops may also be of value in understanding soft skills as well (Rao, 2018). Other recommendations for learning soft skills include being self-aware, listening

attentively, making eye contact, reciprocating with the speaker, being flexible, attending work trainings (Dean & East, 2019), games (Dell'Aquila et al., 2022), and giving compliments (Roa, 2018). Additionally, interpersonal communication is of value when one utilizes it as an avenue to accepting constructive criticism (Roa, 2018). When those individuals who wish to learn soft skill grow in adaptability, they are helping their own growth (Roa, 2018).

Among active learning techniques recommended to improve soft skills (Martin, 2019), project-based learning and work apprenticeships are other ways to learn soft skills (Roa, 2018). Group discussions and performing arts can also be helpful (Roa, 2018). Additionally, Roa (2018) listed and explained three categories of strategy to train soft skills: expository, guided, and active. Expository training would include lectures and seminars. Guided strategies would include workshops and debates. Finally, active training would include training that falls into the category of experiential learning and would include games and role playing. Overall, soft skills are vital for people to possess because of their many benefits (Collins, 2021), and methods to inculcate these skills in college students have been explored.

Business education, in particular, teaches hard and soft skills, as business/management is a field in which soft skills are essential (Bhagra & Sharma, 2018). Due to this fact, one method suggested to inculcate soft skills in college students is to implement business education across all disciplines (Saeger et al., 2019). Perhaps the process of learning by experience is key to this suggestion, as experiential learning is

among the instruments by which soft skills are taught in business education courses (Saeger et al, 2019).

Several soft skills are taught by business educators that tend to be neglected in other career tracks (Saeger et al, 2019), despite their necessity in a plethora of careers (Chakraborty, 2022; Collins, 2021; Continisio et al, 2021). The following are proficiencies developed by business educators: communication, problem solving, critical thinking, organizational systems, leadership, teamwork, ethics, and legal responsibility (Saeger et al, 2019). Business courses provide soft skills training that other disciplines (e.g., healthcare and information technology) neglect to the detriment of students, who need these skills for success in the industries (Saeger et al, 2019).

These skills have been deemed helpful and even necessary for individuals to possess (Chakraborty, 2022; Smith et al., 2021). The importance of these skills is so emphasized in the literature that multiple ways of gaining these skills have been provided. As determinants of success these skills have attracted the attention of researchers such as Chakraborty (2022) and Collins (2021).

Soft Skills in Relationships

Social norms differ among cultures (Goleman, 1997). For instance, in some cultures, displays of emotion are not acceptable, whereas they are more typical in other cultures (Goleman, 1997). Soft skills that involve interpersonal interactions are especially important in maintaining healthy relationships (Goleman, 1997), including work relationships (Wisker & Paulis, 2015).

Soft skills and emotional intelligence are vital in positive societal contribution (Goleman, 1997; Smith et al., 2021). For instance, being able to respond appropriately to one's environment allows a person to be seen in a positive light by others (Goleman, 1997). People skills are helpful in navigating personal relationships (Goleman, 1997), and soft skills, in general, are vital to one's personal life in the community (Smith et al., 2021). Understanding social cues and relating positively to others plays a crucial role in relationship maintenance (Goleman, 1997). Soft skills allow individuals to positively contribute to their families and their communities (Smith et al., 2021). A deficit in the arena of the social arts is crippling in life and relationships (Goleman, 1997).

Soft Skills and Employment

Beyond the views of hiring managers and executives, new hires, themselves, affirmed that communication skills (oral and written) and other soft skills as important for workplace success (Chakraborty, 2022; MacDermott & Ortiz, 2017). Getting hired and performing well in a job is dependent upon one's level of soft skills (Stewart et al., 2020). The benefits of soft skills are not limited to one field, but are evident in multiple fields (Grimmer, 2021; MacDermott & Ortiz, 2017; Smith et al., 2021). In fact, numerous fields require sufficient soft skills (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2022).

Soft skills are needed in employment (Chakraborty, 2022; Collins, 2021), as they increase one's employability (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021). Individuals who possess soft skills are more likely to be hired than those who do not possess these skills (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021). College business faculty have noted the importance of soft skills

(Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021), a fact that shows their perceived importance in employment (Chakraborty, 2022).

Some soft skills were identified for careers in health services and healthcare (Continisio, 2021; Saeger et al., 2019). The set of skills required for health services encompasses proficiency in technological systems, including maintenance, operation, and design; soft skills needed for information technology careers include video conferencing ability, problem solving, presentation management, oral communication, and proficiency in handling technological systems (Saeger et al., 2019).

The literature has shown that soft skills are important in the area of employability and workplace productivity. Soft skills are vital to workplace success across a plethora of fields (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021), and workplace interactions and job satisfaction are linked to these types of skills (Dean & East, 2019). Hard skills are insufficient to sustain employees, and soft skill proficiency is required in order to maximize workplace efficiency and to allow businesses to flourish (Dean & East, 2019). Soft skills have been recognized as beneficial in the personal lives (Smith et al., 2021) and business lives of individuals (Chakraborty, 2022; Collins, 2021; Grimmer, 2021). They allow people to get along with one another and to function well in a career. Therefore, soft skills are valued as salutary (Chakraborty, 2022; Smith et al., 2021).

Soft Skills Deficit in College Graduates

The fact that soft skills are lauded as valuable in today's time has been extrapolated from the relevant literature (Smith et al., 2021). However, despite the recognition that soft skills have attained due to their perceived value in life and in the

workplace (Smith et al., 2021), they are not always represented among graduates of higher education institutions who enter the workforce (Stewart et al., 2020). In fact, soft skills are not well-represented in college graduates embarking on their careers (Payscale, 2016). This section will describe this soft skill deficit, the scope of the deficit, the deficit in the world of business and management, and proposed solutions to the deficit.

Description of Deficit

Despite the recognized value and necessity of soft skills, these vital assets are reported as lacking among recent graduates of higher education institutions (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021; Stewart et al., 2020; Payscale, 2016). In the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) *Job Outlook Report*, grade point average, problem-solving, and the ability to work in a team were found to be the top three qualities employers desired in new hires (NACE, 2020). Regardless of this finding, graduates tend to lack these qualities (Payscale, 2016). The following skills are among those reported as missing in these graduates: critical thinking, problem solving, attention to detail, communication, ownership, leadership, and interpersonal skills and teamwork (Payscale, 2016). In addition to functioning as a barrier to employment, this soft skills deficit has been counted as an obstruction in performing exceptionally on the job (Stewart et al., 2020).

This deficit in soft skills can be seen in the research of Stewart et al. (2020). Stewart et al. (2020) organized a 2016 research project in which 12 employers were invited to discuss what they desire in college graduates. All 12 employers agreed that college graduates did not possess the soft skills required for job acquisition. This statistic

is unfortunate considering the critical nature of soft skills to workplace success (Stewart et al, 2020). One recommendation that was noted to avoid this gap was to increase experiential learning in college curricula (Stewart et al., 2020).

In addition to the research of Stewart et al. (2020), Payscale has also contributed to the research of the soft skill gap. A Payscale (2016) survey reported that hiring managers believed that soft skills were lacking in recent college graduates. These skills include critical thinking/problem solving, attention to detail, communication, ownership, leadership, interpersonal skills, teamwork, grit, and curiosity.

Hard skills are not sufficient for competing in today's workforce, and soft skills are a necessary requisite to this end (Dean & East, 2019). Even experience is not always satisfactory to compete in today's workforce (Collins, 2021). Even so, many professionals do not possess these important skills that are vital to success in fields such as emergency management and business continuity (Gladstone & Brown, 2022). Additionally, critical thinking, problem solving, attention to detail, communication, ownership, leadership, and interpersonal skills/teamwork were lacking in recent college graduates (Payscale, 2016). The top-ranking soft skills that recruiters desire are problem solving, adaptability, and time management (ICIMS, 2018).

One study by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2018) demonstrated that over half of hiring managers and executives surveyed did not believe that recent college graduates possessed an adequate level of oral communication or *real-world* skills. Most of these managers and executives also stated that they would like to see colleges and universities equip students more thoroughly for job performance and

advancement (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2018). According to the Society for Human Resource Management (2019), 75% of job recruiters said that a skills gap was responsible for the applicant shortage, with soft skills such as communication lacking among individuals. The same source listed the top skills that are missing in this shortage: problem solving, critical thinking, innovation, creativity, handling complexity and ambiguity, and communication. Though this study was not restricted to college graduates alone, the results reveal the versatility of the skills deficit problem. Unfortunately, these skills are not always taught appropriately, leaving professionals without the proper training in their professional lives (Continisio, 2021; Kniaz & Chukhno, 2021).

Scope of the Deficit

The soft skill deficit is not unique to one field. Rather, it is represented in multiple fields, including healthcare (Saeger et al., 2019), business (Gladstone & Brown, 2022), engineering (Munir, 2021), politics (Collins, 2021), and library science (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2022). Library and information science was one field found lacking in representation of employees with soft skills (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2022). In one study, most nurses and nurse managers did not recognize the value of soft skills such as communication in their practice (Sherine et al., 2021). A shift in college curricula may prove to be the remedy to this deficit as well (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2022). In general, recent college graduates do lack soft skills (Stewart et al., 2020). This fact remains despite the value of soft skills being espoused not only for professionals, but also for blue-collar workers as well (Rao, 2018).

The view of soft skills as important is not unique to the United States. In fact, communication was one soft skill that is required by employers across the globe (Marjanovikj-Apostolovski, 2019). Adequate soft skill curriculum was not present in Pakistani higher education (Manan, 2021). Additionally, United States Virgin Island employers desired graduates with soft skills (MacKenzie, 2021). Furthermore, the World Bank found Macedonian employees to be lacking in soft skills (Rutkowski, 2009, as cited in Marjanovikj-Apostolovski, 2019).

In the United Kingdom, soft skills and employability have been recognized as functioning in tandem (Tang, 2019). The Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia (2017, as cited in Tang, 2019) found that higher education graduates lack soft skills. Tang (2019) found in his study that the participating lecturers were often not able to adequately integrate soft skills into the curriculum. Malaysian higher education tended to value the relationship between soft skills and employability (Teng et al., 2019). Students at Malaysian universities were more likely to recognize the school's role in developing soft skills than their Chinese university student counterparts were (Teng et al., 2019). Soft skills are also valued in Bologna, as they are integral to career advancement (Savinova et al., 2019). Continuing education is necessary to provide the soft skill that are needed in the field of law in Russia (Почивалова, 2022). Additionally, South African engineering students reported that they did not receive adequate soft skill training in their higher education institutions that would prepare them for success in the workforce (Munir, 2021).

Furthermore, soft skills are deemed necessary for employability in management graduates, and the way in which these skills are to be instilled is via higher education institutions (Bhagra & Sharma, 2018). While the proper credentials were once qualifying for an ambitious graduate, soft skills are now essential for a successful career (Bhagra & Sharma, 2018). For instance, social skills are now viewed as important in the workforce (Deming, 2017). In other words, while the correct college degree was once seen as qualifying a person for a position, soft skills are now added to the list of qualifications (Bhagra & Sharma, 2018).

Business and Management Field Issues

This section presents the information in the current literature on soft skills in the business field. In this project, the field of business will be treated as a broad umbrella term under which sub-fields are included, such as management, accounting, finance, marketing, advertising, etc. Soft skills are intimately related to the field of business, as one finds in the literature on the topic.

While soft skills were said to be encouraged in general (Smith et al., 2021), some soft skills were reported to relate to leadership (Grimmer, 2021; Roa, 2018; Veleva, 2020). This is because some soft skills are specifically salutary for leaders to possess (Roa, 2018). These would include the following: communication, time management, team building, analytical ability, trouble shooting, presentation skills, entrepreneurship, listening, empathy, flexibility, and adaptability (Roa, 2018).

Soft skill development appears to be a focus of the school of business (Saeger et al., 2019). Business education was said to require soft skill inculcation for the purpose of

student workforce preparation (Saeger et al., 2019), as soft skills are an asset to business professionals (Collins, 2021; Veleva, 2020) and in some instances considered essential (McCrary, 2022). Soft skills (employability skills) that are established in the secondary and post-secondary years that prepare students for careers in the business field include the following: critical thinking, leadership, oral and written communication, teamwork, problem, solving, and project management (Saeger et al., 2019). Soft skills in the world of business and business classrooms is a topic found in the current literature (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021). Employees possessing these competencies can be a challenge for employers to find, an inconvenient observation considering the vital role that these skills play in employment (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021).

Ninety-two percent of executives surveyed were reported as viewing soft skills at the same level of importance or higher than technical skills, but 89% stated that they found it challenging to find qualified individuals (Davidson, 2016). Saunders and Bajjaly (2021) surveyed the recent literature and found that soft skills such as oral and written communication are reported by employers as lacking. Business schools were reported as either not addressing soft skills at all or not teaching them thoroughly (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021). Only a handful of studies have examined business faculty perceptions of soft skills (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021).

When 167 higher education business instructors answered a survey regarding soft skills, over half of the faculty believed that the soft skills presented were important (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021). Of the soft skills listed in the survey, communication skills were ranked at the highest level of importance, with 81% of faculty ranking them as

“extremely important.” The “extremely important” label was applied to interpersonal skills, adaptability/flexibility, teamwork, writing skills, presentation skills, and reflective practice by 77%, 62%, 61 %, 58%, 55%, and 21%, respectively.

Additionally, the survey asked about the responsibility of faculty to teach soft skills (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021). Over half of instructors agreed or strongly agreed that they should teach the majority of the soft skills listed. Once again, communication was the skill that was rated the highest, with bachelor-level and master-level instructors 94% and 90% percent, respectively.

The third question on the Saunders and Bajjaly (2021) survey asked about soft skill classroom instruction. Communication, presentation, writing, teamwork, interpersonal skills were taught by over half the faculty, while other soft skills were taught by less than half of the faculty. Those who taught the skills did so through discussions, lectures, and demonstrations.

In the business subset of advertising, research on leadership is scant (Padmini et al., 2022). However, some information exists on the topic. The top qualities noted in successful leaders were a focus on people, a focus on the future, and collaboration in the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia (Padmini et al, 2022). In this study, integrity and vision were considered attributes of good leaders. In spite of these findings, some college graduates do not possess the employability skills required for success in the workforce (Continisio et al., 2021).

Proposed Solutions

The importance of soft skills has been shown, as well as the deficit in skills in college-educated individuals. Despite the value of soft skills (Smith et al., 2021), the deficit continues. Soft skills have been acknowledged as important in professional development, in careers (Riley & Nicewics, 2022), and in the social lives of individuals (Edward & Jang, 2022). Some solutions have been presented to curb the deficit and to teach soft skills (Valerio, 2022; Saeger et al., 2019). A solution is needed because the workforce is suffering with this skills gap (Continisio et al., 2021). Qualified individuals have been difficult to find (Continisio et al., 2021), and therefore, solutions have been sought to handle this situation (Munir, 2021).

Training in higher education is one way to inculcate soft skills (Munir, 2021). The majority of recommendations seem to fall into the broad category of active learning, in which students play a vital role in the learning process (Valerio, 2022; Saeger et al., 2019). In active learning, students are engaged in their own learning rather than passively listening to a lecture being presented by an instructor (Martin, 2019). While active learning encompasses a broad umbrella, virtually every recommendation found in the literature fits in some way into this category (Martin, 2019, Rao, 2018; Valerio, 2022). In order to help business students develop soft skills, the use of an active learning approach rather than the lecture method of teaching was recommended (Martin, 2019). This was recommended because active and experiential learning can be utilized to inculcate soft skills (Rao, 2018).

According to Rao (2018), three specific categories of soft skills training exist, and two of them could be classified as active learning (Martin, 2019). The first category was that of interaction with skills, such as apprenticeships, group discussions, and performing arts (Rao, 2018). Rao's second category was expository training. Expository training, the only passive approach suggested, includes seminars and lectures, and Rao stated that they are of some benefit in gaining soft skills (Rao, 2018). The third category was active training, which would include strategies such as role playing (Rao, 2018) and games (Rao, 2018; Dell'Aquila et al., 2022; Riley & Nicewicz, 2022). Beyond the three categories, other suggestions have been made to encourage inculcation of soft skills. For instance, internships with practical learning opportunities may be utilized to remedy the soft skills gap; additionally, the idea of a flexible work environment has been suggested for use in business schools (Stewart et al., 2020). The method would involve student and staff collaboration to teach students soft skills (Stewart, et al., 2020).

One proposal was soft skill inculcation through games (Riley & Nicewics, 2022; Dell'Aquila et al., 2022), even video games (Edward & Jang, 2022; Shin & Kim, 2022). These soft skills taught via playing games are skills that are needed for the workforce (Riley & Nicewics, 2022). The flipped classroom technique, in which students lead the class rather than an instructor providing a lecture, has been suggested to teach soft skills (Moundy et al., 2022). However, the literature is mixed on whether or not this strategy is effective (Betti et al., 2022; Moundy et al., 2022). Because of the perceived benefits of soft skills, institutions of higher learning have taken to integrating them into their curricula (Betti et al., 2022), and some have even espoused the view that general

education courses should incorporate these broad skills into their curriculum (Thonney & Montgomery, 2019).

For Rao (2018), foreign and native learning opportunities exist for individuals desiring to develop soft skills. Among the foreign options, speaking a foreign language and traveling may boost these competencies (Rao, 2018). The option of soft skills workshops is available for students who desire to remain in their native land (Rao, 2018). For individuals who desire to learn soft skills while going about their usual affairs, Rao's advice was that practicing certain habits can afford results. One such practice is being self-aware (part of emotional intelligence) (Rao, 2018). Students of soft skill learning may even learn as they engage in conversations with others, as listening closely and making eye contact are niceties that are educational for the one engaging views in dialogue (Rao, 2018).

According to Rao (2018), when it comes time for the listener to speak, one may continue to refine these employability skills with a series of steps. Initially, reciprocate with the speaker with regard to what was said. Secondly, be agreeable. Finally, learn to give compliments to those with whom a person engages. In performing these actions, individuals wishing to improve their soft skills through these interactions which occur numerous times throughout the average day (Rao, 2018). This conversational approach to learning soft skills demonstrates the interconnectedness and overlap between soft skills and emotional intelligence (Walton, 2021). Some social skills are said to improve soft skills, such as adaptability (Rao, 2018). The person who is adaptable is one who is not hesitant to receive constructive criticism well and to make necessary changes as a result;

the adaptable person is one who is humble enough to welcome helpful censure if it means improving behavior (Rao, 2018).

Business education has actually been offered as a solution to the soft skill deficit. Experiential learning is a quality of business education; business education implementation across all disciplines may be the answer to the soft skills deficit (Saeger et al., 2019). Other disciplines (e.g., information technology or healthcare) tend to neglect the soft skills training implicit in business education. Students in other fields are, in fact, harmed by such practices because their success in their respective fields are hindered by a soft skill deficit (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021). Business educators are said to develop competencies such as communication, problem solving, leadership, teamwork, legal responsibility, and critical thinking (Saeger et al., 2019). These qualities would all fall into the category of soft skills rather than technical (hard) skills. One final observation is that physics competition may promote students' soft skill development in the earlier years of education (Dziob et al., 2022).

While the importance of soft skills in the workforce has been recognized (Riley & Nicewics, 2022), instructors faced a challenge in integrating soft skill training into business (specifically marketing) classes (Riley & Nicewics, 2022). However, regardless of the challenge, interactive games and group projects simulating real life business (McCrary, 2022) may prove to be valuable in inculcating soft skills in business students (Riley & Nicewics, 2022). A communication and conflict resolution training program were found to increase the levels of these soft skills in college-age students (Morozova, et al., 2022). Because of the soft skills requisite of many jobs, soft skills training may also

be implemented as part of other online courses tailored for adult learners (Konobeiev et al., 2022).

Regardless of the time-consuming nature of soft skill teaching (Rao, 2019), these skills are teachable (Gladstone & Brown, 2022), and methods have been devised to accomplish this. One such method provided a framework for teaching soft skills to engineering students in European Universities (Geraedts et al., 2022). The importance of soft skills in engineering students was recognized as the impetus for such a framework (Geraedts et al., 2022).

In this section, the soft skill deficit was described. The far-reaching gap in professionals with respect to these nontechnical skills has been widely reported. Not only are soft skills lacking in the United States, but also across the globe. Regardless of the respect that soft skills receive as being helpful in careers, the gap persists.

Summary and Conclusions

In conclusion, with higher education graduates lacking the soft skills required for optimal workplace performance, some suggestions have been made by those who have noted this deficit. The Walden University Library was used to search peer-reviewed literature related to the subject of the soft skills. The value of soft skills, the deficit, and recommendations to remedy the deficit were reviewed and the implications of the deficit were discussed in depth. Still unknown are specific soft skill gaps among recent college graduates, a gap in the literature which this study will address. Chapter 3 will explain the research method chosen for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore faculty perceptions of soft skill gaps in components of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills—among recent college graduates. Ten interviews were conducted. In this chapter, the following topics regarding the research method will be discussed: research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

This study was directed by five research questions pertaining to recent college graduates. Recent college graduates refer to those who have graduated within the past 2 years. The first question concerned how higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in self-awareness. The second question addressed how higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in self-awareness. The third question asked how higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in motivation, and the fourth question asked how faculty describe soft skill gaps in empathy. The fifth research question asked how faculty describe soft skill gaps in the area of general social skills.

As noted in the literature review, college graduates do not always possess the necessary soft skills for success in the workplace. These soft skills provide many advantages in the workplace and in life, and individuals who lack these pertinent abilities may not be able to succeed in the workplace to the degree that they would otherwise do so (Chakraborty, 2022). Because the professional lives of individuals are at stake, as well

as the corporations themselves, a solution to this problem would benefit individuals and businesses alike (Dean & East, 2019).

This study used a basic qualitative research design to answer the questions posed. Basic qualitative research is nonobjective (i.e., subjective; Glogowska, 2011). In this case, subjective views of higher education were brought to light; the individuals providing these opinions were those who had knowledge and experience in higher education and in the workforce. According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), novelty, truth, and relevance are valuable assets in qualitative research. Additionally, qualitative research must have the following characteristics: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Qualitative writing is narrative, and the analysis of data expands throughout the entire process of writing. Qualitative writing also tends to be longer than its quantitative counterpart (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

In this study, the perspectives of faculty were gathered via semistructured personal interviews. These interviewees were subjects whose knowledge and experience with the relevant student population qualified them to speak intelligibly on such matters. Because the purpose of the study involved subjective opinion, the qualitative design was precisely what was needed to conduct the study.

According to Freshwater (2020), the qualitative design allows researchers to describe phenomena and to reflect on the description. In this study, what is observed and recorded in interviews was described and reflected upon. The interviews themselves focused on obtaining perspectives on the soft skill deficit in recent graduates and included the idea of working toward a potential solution. With the soft skill deficit

documented in the literature, professionals who work with college students and individuals in the workforce were excellent candidates to speak of possible reasons for the deficit and possible solutions.

Another research design for a study such as this one is the quantitative design. The quantitative design tends toward the concrete and objective, recording its data in tangible and objective measures (Glogowska, 2011). The quantitative research design sometimes is salutary for use in a study involving numerical data (Glogowska, 2011). However, the quantitative design was not chosen because the nature of a study centering on opinions of the soft skill deficit requires a more subjective approach, one that is best exemplified by the qualitative design.

Furthermore, mixed methods studies utilize both qualitative and quantitative data within the same research project (Glogowska, 2011). Mixed methods studies allow researchers to view problems from multiple angles—objectively and subjectively (Glogowska, 2011). However, this research study was subjective in nature, as the views of the soft skill deficit needed to be gathered through the qualitative method—in this case, an interview process.

The basic qualitative design aligned well with the problem, purpose, and research questions because of the subjective element in this type of data collection (Glogowska, 2011). These personal interviews were the means by which the data to be analyzed were collected. The data were in the form of personal interview responses as recorded by me as the researcher. By way of these personal interviews of the appropriate professionals, the soft skills gap was evaluated as a problem, and solutions were sought. Because the

interview subjects were those who worked with college students and employees, their views about the soft skill deficit were anticipated as enlightening comments.

After the interview process was complete, the recorded responses were evaluated for common themes; similar responses among multiple interview subjects were given particular care and examination. By way of examining responses from interviewees and collecting similarities into themed categories, perspectives on the soft skill deficit were brought to light, and solutions may be sought.

Role of the Researcher

As the sole researcher in this project, I had the role of collecting the appropriate data via personal interviews and analyzing the data in order to mine the opinions of qualified professionals. Additionally, I was responsible for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data in an ethical manner. A researcher must also remain unbiased to the degree that such a task is possible. Furthermore, I observed research ethics by allowing subject confidentiality (Surmiak, 2018).

As a researcher with opinions of my own, I understood the potential of bias in the research. For instance, I am in favor of broad, liberal educational training in higher education institutions, and I tend to believe that colleges and universities have lowered the standard of what it means to be an educated individual over the past 150 years.

However, personal bias was not allowed denigrate the ability to listen objectively to the views of individuals who were qualified to speak on such matters. Therefore, the objective of this study was to collect data that relate to the soft skill deficit. In order to mitigate bias, individuals were interviewed from multiple disciplines and various

backgrounds. The interview questions were leading questions through which I sought to establish a particular type of solution to this quandary. Additionally, member checking was conducted; after the interview process had been completed, the interview subjects were allowed to review the transcripts of the interview in order to be sure that they were accurate representations.

Professional relationships existed with some of the participants due to employment by the college where the interviews were conducted. However, personal relationships did not exist with any of the interview subjects, nor had much contact been made with many of them professionally. No interview subject was a workplace inferior.

Because an employee/employer or other such authority relationship did not exist with the participants, there was little concern of coercion toward certain interview responses. Additionally, a close working relationship did not exist with any of the interviewees.

Nevertheless, because of the potential for bias in these relationships due to sharing the same employer and (in some cases) professional and personal acquaintance, professional conduct and clarity regarding the ethical procedures were maintained. The interview subjects were told that their participation was voluntary and that they could retract their consent at any time. Additionally, the member checking process aimed to improve objectivity in the research.

Methodology

In the process of this research, basic qualitative design was utilized to gather the perspectives of the interview subjects in the study. As aforementioned, because of its

subjective nature, the qualitative design was ideal for a study based upon subjective views of higher education and employment (Glogowska, 2011); additionally, the design aligned well with the problem, purpose, and research questions for the same reasons.

Higher education faculty were recruited for semistructured personal interviews. These professionals were employed at a community college. The interviews were used to collect and compare data. The interview protocol can be viewed in Appendix A. The appendix shows the proper alignment among the interview questions and the research questions. After the interviews, the data were reviewed and analyzed. In the data review and analysis, participant views were revealed as similar and dissimilar.

Participant Selection

Population

The general population was instructors of college level-students in the Midwestern United States. The target population was faculty who had experience in working with college students. The participants were selected conveniently from a small community college in the Midwestern United States. Interviews were sought from faculty employed by the same facility. Therefore, interview subjects were from the same geographical region and college.

The college of the study's setting offers general education courses and specialized career-track courses and programs. Faculty were interviewed with questions probing them about their opinions of the soft skill deficit. These individuals were in a good position to comment on the current issue because of their close proximity to college students, who would soon be recent college graduates. Additionally, they were familiar

with class structures and guidelines that may contribute to or help to curb the soft skill deficit.

Sampling Strategy

The interview participants were chosen through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was ideal for this study because it enabled participants to be chosen who possessed certain characteristics necessary for properly assessing the soft skill deficit (Campbell et al., 2020). In this study, the necessary qualifications were familiarity with college students and recent college graduates as well as their soft skill performance level. Twelve to 15 interviews were originally sought. This number was thought to be a manageable sample that contained neither too few nor too many participants. This number of participants was thought to provide enough data for this study but did not provide an overabundance of data that went beyond saturation. Nine to 17 interviews are considered to be sufficient for saturation to occur (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

If interviews would not have been able to be procured from employees of the aforementioned community college, then I would have attempted to recruit faculty from another community college. Several options of colleges existed for this study if the first plan had not succeeded. Therefore, if the initial sampling had not provided the numbers needed, then the other options would have been sought.

Certain criteria must be met for the faculty to be interviewed about the soft skill deficit, such as knowledge of working with students. This expertise was assumed based upon the job description of a community college instructor. With the exception of region,

no demographic information was collected from the population because this information was not relevant to the subject of the soft skill deficit.

The participants were sought out based upon their job qualifications as listed on the college website. Each participant was contacted via email, phone, or in person with a request for an interview. The purpose of the study was explained to each interviewee, and after the interviewees agree to participate, dates and times were scheduled.

Instrumentation

The qualitative design used interviews to gain information from individuals (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The instruments of data collection were semistructured, audio-recorded, personal, in-person interviews lasting between 45 and 60 minutes each. These interviews were originally planned to utilize 12–15 individuals, but 10 interviews were later decided upon as a sufficient number.

The purpose of these interviews was to gather information from the interview subjects as they reflected on the interview questions and shared their views of the soft skill deficit. This interview process allowed data to be gathered about the research problem from individuals who were well-qualified to comment on the problem. Many interview questions pertained to the categories of emotional intelligence theory and individual soft skills. The interview questions and responses are located in Appendix B. A field test was implemented, utilizing two volunteers who had knowledge of the topic but were not participants in the study. Conditions were similar to conditions that occurred in the study. Both interviews were within the expected range (about 50 minutes each). As feedback, two new interview questions (Questions 20 and 21) were suggested, and one

question was reworded. Question 13 was originally asked in the following manner: “Do you see an individual’s desire to succeed or to be a leader as a factor in the deficit? If yes, then how so?” It was changed to the following wording: “Do you see an individual’s desire to succeed or to be a leader as a factor in the deficit? If yes, then how so?”

Question 15 was also changed from “How do you see the way individuals perceive others playing a role in soft skill development?” to “Do you believe that an individual’s perception of others plays any role in soft skills development?” These questions were later scrapped altogether in favor of more simple and straightforward questions having to do with the study’s framework and research questions. Advice was also given to remind the interviewee of the concept of soft skills and emotional intelligence as well as to make clearer what the “deficit” in question referred to specifically.

The interviews took place after the study received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and when the participants consented to the interviews. The interview protocol followed ethical and professional guidelines, and the questions aligned with the research questions. Before I interviewed the subjects, introductions occurred, and the purpose of the study and the interview were stated. Additionally, the participants were thanked for their participation. The participants were made aware of IRB approval; additionally, they were made aware that answering the questions was voluntary and that the interview could be ended at any time if desired.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

First, permission to use the site was obtained (Appendix F). Next, the relevant individuals, whose contact information was located in the college catalogue, were

contacted. Some contact information of faculty was provided by the institution and by a test interview participant. Potential interview subjects were contacted via email, phone, and in-person visit in order to request an interview (Appendix D). For the consenting individuals, interview dates and times were scheduled. My email was provided to the interview participants (Appendix D).

Informed consent was requested via email before the interview commenced. The interview participants were told of the voluntary nature of the study and that they could withdraw their consent at any time. The semistructured one-on-one interviews were conducted remotely and in-person, in the approximate timeframe of 45 minutes to 1 hour. Zoom recordings were used to record the interviews, and some notes were taken.

After the interviews, transcripts of the interview questions and responses were composed. I provided the participants with the transcripts of the interviews in order to afford to them the opportunity to amend any of their responses within 7 days of receiving the transcript. After 7 days, all responses were considered to be correct. This process was designed to provide a high level of credibility and to assure the interview participants that their responses were being accurately utilized. Finally, the interview participants were thanked for their participation in the study.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis was used to answer the research questions. The interview questions were aligned with Goleman's components of emotional intelligence and probed views on the deficit in soft skills.

Inductive thematic analysis was utilized in this study. According to Braun and Clark (2006), inductive thematic analysis is driven by the data in that the researcher does not attempt to fit the data into preconceived themes; rather, the themes emerge naturally from the data itself. For this study, the data gathered in the interview process were coded based not upon preconceived categories. Rather, categories for coding emerged from the interview participants' responses themselves. Braun and Clark (2006) outlined six steps of thematic analysis that were followed in this study: data familiarization, initial coding, categorizing codes, theme search, defining and naming, and constructing a report.

After the interviews were complete, the first step was the familiarization of the data. Interview transcripts were created automatically by Zoom, and they were reviewed by the interview participants and the researcher. The second step, initial coding, involved creating codes from the interview transcripts. Thirdly, themes emerged from the codes created via clusters of data. The fourth step included collapsing initial themes into final themes. The next step was viewing the themes and creating names. In this study, some names were kept in their original, simple form, as those inherited from the prior initial themes. Additionally, definitions of these themes were created. These final themes encapsulated the meaning of many other themes. Finally, in view of the research questions and the themes, a report was constructed (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Coding is creating words or phrases that succinctly capture the essence and meaning of a segment of data (Saldaña, 2016). In this study, the interview transcripts were the data. Sandaña (2016) outlined coding as a process. Codes can be a single word or an entire paragraph. By means of coding, potential trends, repetitions, and themes

among the interviewees' responses were noted after summarizing the meaning of phrases spoken by the interview participants. As Saldana recognizes, coding for patterns was performed. The data were organized into categories, and themes arose from those categories. These themes emerged across multiple interviews as common topics or ideas spoken of by multiple participants (Saldaña, 2016).

Trustworthiness

Credibility, transferability, and dependability are qualities of trustworthiness (Stenton, 2004) that this study sought to follow. Strategies were followed in order to provide internal and external validity as well. The outlined procedures were followed as a pathway to a justifiable conclusion. Preconceived notions of results and confirmation bias were avoided (McSweeney, 2021).

Credibility

Credibility refers the idea that what was intended to be measured was measured (Stenton, 2004). In order to establish credibility, upon completion of the transcripts, the researcher will review the audio recordings to ensure accuracy. He also emailed the participants the completed transcripts so that they will have an opportunity to determine whether their responses were accurately captured and if they desire to make amendments to their responses (member checking) (Stenton, 2004). The plan was that, upon conclusion of each interview, the researcher would email the interview participants preliminary analysis notes and will ask that they review them for accuracy and meaning alignment. The researcher was also prepared to record any results that are contrary to expectations (alternative explanations).

Convergence and divergence emerged from the interview responses through the process of comparative analysis. The interview responses from the different individuals were compared and contrasted. The differences and similarities in responses should provide helpful insight into the soft skill deficit. The idea of context and its influences may be helpful to consider in this analysis. By deciphering what is different and what is similar in each context, some light may be shed on the issues surrounding soft skill development in higher education and in the workplace.

The final analysis was formed as the data were gathered and the coding of that data took place. The plan was that, as the researcher continues in the data analysis and coding process, the level of saturation of data was to be determined, and the interview process would cease to gather new candidates when saturation was reached.

As to the idea of reflexivity, the researcher reflected on the views held by himself that may affect the research study and the interview process (Alder, 2022). Part of the reflexive process involved the researcher thinking of his impressions of the project as it progressed (modified reflective commentary) (Stenton, 2004). Potential biases were noted. Personal assumptions and ideas about higher educations and soft skills were noted prior to the researcher embarking on the research process.

Transferability

A thorough description of the background setting of the research environment will increase transferability (Stenton, 2004). Therefore, the researcher gathered information about the background of each interview participant, including their job descriptions and work experience in their current position. In this way, the researcher will gain insight

into why these individuals hold the perspectives they hold. By including more information about the participants themselves and the reasons for their own views on higher education, employment, and soft skills, the transferability of the study was increased.

Dependability

A high level of dependability was upheld in this project in order to allow future replication (Stenton, 2004). For this reason, detailed descriptions of the research process was utilized (Alder, 2022; Stenton, 2004). In order to accomplish this end, member checking was allowed (Stenton, 2004). In this process, the individuals interviewed were allowed to review the transcripts of their own interviews. By this process, dependability was increased because the individuals are able to determine whether the transcript responses match their intended meanings. This process resulted in clarity and dependability. In addition to member checking, audit trails are provided in Appendix C. In these audit trails, the coding process was outlined from beginning to end. The individual codes are provided, along with the way in which these codes were constructed. In this way, dependability of the whole study will be upheld.

Confirmability

Confirmability was upheld in this study to mitigate researcher bias (Stenton, 2004). In order to accomplish this end, reflexivity was utilized (Alder, 2022). I, as the researcher, must acknowledge my preconceptions and biases. Furthermore, the researcher sought to maintain objectivity in the role as the researcher by not asking leading

questions and by being willing to give attention to ideas that he may not subscribe to personally. By being aware of my own views, objectivity can be upheld.

Ethical Procedures

This researcher prioritized ethics in this study in order to protect human research participants from harm. The confidentiality of the interview participants was upheld in this project, allowing the participants to be free of self-censorship (Surmiak, 2018). The guidelines set forth in the Belmont report were followed. The Belmont report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) covers three principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Respect involves the idea that researchers should respect the autonomous choices of individuals to participate or not to participate in research and that individuals who are not considered autonomous are protected. Beneficence refers to the idea of minimizing harm and maximizing benefit to subjects. Justice is the concept that researchers should be treated fairly and equally. The researcher did not collect any data before he received IRB approval from Walden University. Federal and university policies, therefore, were upheld in this study.

According to the requirements of the IRB, the researcher informed each interview participant that his or her participation is voluntary and that it may be discontinued at any time. The researcher ensured that the identities of the participants and their institution would not be recognized by utilizing appropriately vague terminology. The researcher did not use any personal information of the research participants outside of this research project. Each participant gave informed consent in order to participate in the study. The

researcher informed the participants of the IRB approval and confidentiality guidelines that will be followed as this study is conducted.

After IRB approval was received, the researcher followed the appropriate guidelines of the IRB, including confidentiality of the participants. He stored all information related to the study on password-protected devices, and the researcher was the only person with access to the information. The personal information was destroyed five years after completion of the study. The identities of the participants were kept confidential, and special identifications will be given to them for the purposes of this study (Faculty 1, etc.). No demographic information (age, race, sex, residence, etc.) was collected. Appropriate levels of privacy during the interview process were maintained as well.

The researcher complied with the Office for Human Research Protections in avoiding harm to the participants in any way (mentally, physically, or legally). The participants were informed that their participation in this study was voluntary and may terminate at any time they wish. Additionally, the researcher informed them of the requirement of informed consent. Each participant will be told that the interview process will not impose unnecessary risk. Furthermore, the researcher informed the participants of the safeguards in place to ensure privacy.

No conflicts of interest were noted. Although the researcher works at the same institution as the individuals he will be interviewing, he has had limited personal contact with many of them. No personal gain may be received by utilizing these particular interview participants.

Summary

This chapter comprised several topics related to the research method: the research design and methodology, participant selection, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and ethics. This study utilized semistructured one-on-one interviews of qualified professionals in order to gain pertinent insight into the problem of a soft skill deficit in higher education graduates. The identities of the participants and their institution remained confidential.

The data were collected via 10 semistructured one-on-one interviews of individuals who are employed at a community college. The roles of these individuals are highly varied, and this diversity provided ample opportunity to study the soft skill deficit from the lens of several job descriptions and perspectives. Five research questions regarding components of emotional intelligence were analyzed. Analysis proceeded using Braun and Clark's suggested process. The results of the study were reported in Chapter 4. The setting of the study and details of the methodological procedures as they actually took place will be explained in order to increase the level of trustworthiness of this study. Findings will be presented by research question.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore faculty perceptions of soft skill gaps in components of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill—through semistructured interviews. The research questions were based on the problem of how higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and general social skills among recent college graduates. The following research questions guided this study:

- RQ1: How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in self-awareness among recent college graduates?
- RQ2: How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in self-regulation among recent college graduates?
- RQ3: How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in motivation among recent college graduates?
- RQ4: How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in empathy among recent college graduates?
- RQ5: How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in general social skills among recent college graduates?

This chapter contains an outline of the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness. These elements will be explained so that the reader may understand the process of collecting data that occurred in this study. With a thorough explanation of the process, the trustworthiness of the study will be increased.

Setting

Ten faculty members from a 2-year community college in the Midwest were chosen to be included in this study. Higher education faculty were ideal candidates to comment on graduate soft skills because of their daily contact with students who are in the workforce or who will soon be in the workforce. These faculty members had diverse backgrounds and taught various disciplines; this scenario was perfect for viewing a variety of opinions about a topic. Faculty disciplines ranged across fields and courses, including college orientation, math, science, psychology, nursing, and health care. No known personal or organizational conditions existed that would have influenced the participants' responses at the time of this study, and there were no significant changes to the procedures for recruitment, data collection, or analysis.

Data Collection

Number of Participants

As previously noted, 10 faculty members were interviewed for this study. The disciplines taught by the faculty were diverse. Several fields were represented in this study, and because of this, a broader look at the problem was made possible. Ten participants were a good number for the study because the sample was small enough to be manageable but large enough to collect a decent sample size for analysis. According to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), 10 interviews is within range for saturation to occur. All participants were instructors from the same community college in the Midwest. The participants' identifiers and disciplines taught can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1*Participant Information*

Identifier	Discipline taught
Participant A	Orientation
Participant B	CNA, Phlebotomy
Participant C	Math
Participant D	Science
Participant E	Math
Participant F	Psychology
Participant G	Nursing classroom/clinical
Participant H	Nursing classroom/clinical
Participant I	Nursing classroom/clinical
Participant J	Nursing clinical

Location, Frequency, and Duration of Interviews

After receiving approval from the IRB, approximately 70 faculty members were requested to participate in the study via email, all from the same college. Very few responses were received in proportion to the emails sent. There was a span of over 2 months between the first and final interview. These interviews were completed using Zoom, and the Zoom automated transcription was used to transcribe the interviews.

The interview questions were asked in a conversational manner so that the flow of the discussion was not impeded. The interview protocol (Appendix B) was used, but with a degree of flexibility to allow for probing and follow-up questions. Participants were encouraged to continue speaking about topics of interest to them rather than strictly following the script verbatim. This allowed the interviews to become more in-depth and to allow an informal tone to characterize the interviews while still ensuring that each question was answered by each participant.

Recording of Data

Zoom was utilized to interview the participants. Only audio was captured. Before the data collection commenced, each participant was sent a form detailing the interview procedures, voluntary nature of the study, risks and benefits of the study, and privacy information. The audio of each interview was recorded using Zoom, and Zoom was also utilized to generate a transcript in 12-point double-spaced Times New Roman font.

Before the questioning began, the participants were told the purpose of the study and reminded about their informed consent. The interview protocol was followed, and the interviews generally lasted between 30 minutes and 1 hour (see Table 2).

Table 2

Interview Duration and Transcript Length

Participants	Interview duration (minutes)	Transcript length (pages)
Participant A	28	24
Participant B	61	33
Participant C	43	25
Participant D	31	22
Participant E	40	22
Participant F	30	19
Participant G	34	14
Participant H	37	21
Participant I	28	16
Participant J	46	29

After the interviews were completed, the participants were sent a copy of their interview transcript to member check. Five participants approved the transcripts with no changes, two participants approved the transcripts with minor changes, and three

participants did not respond to the member checking email. If participants did not respond within a week, the transcripts were assumed to be correct as transcribed.

Variations in Data Collection Process

No significant irregular circumstances emerged during the data collection process. A few technological difficulties were encountered. During several interviews, the phone used for the Zoom meetings shut off and turned back on unexpectedly. When I returned to the Zoom meeting, I explained to the participants the nature of the problem and resumed the interview. This brief delay did not negatively influence the interview process. Additionally, during one interview, the internet signal was not strong, and the recording repeatedly cut out. The resulting transcript was choppy and unintelligible in several places; nevertheless, enough of the interview remained intact to use for analysis.

Two changes were noted in the process of the research that diverged from the original plan. First, while the original plan was to obtain 12 to 15 interviews and for interviews to cease upon appropriate saturation, the decision to complete only 10 interviews as a sufficient number for this study was approved by my chair. Additionally, the participants were not asked to review any notes taken during the data collection procedure; this process would have given the participants a role in the analysis that they should not have. This decision was also approved by my chair, as member checking was sufficient.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was used to provide the themes needed to answer the research questions regarding Goleman's components of emotional intelligence as they relate to the

soft skill deficit. Through familiarization with the data, two steps of coding, and two levels of theme development, the data were mined from the interviews. Following is the six-phase process that was utilized to analyze the data for this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 1: Data Familiarization

During the aforementioned process of member checking via transcript approval, familiarization with the raw data was accomplished. The interview transcripts were cleaned up by editing obvious, important errors in transcription, before they were sent to the interview subjects for review. During the clean-up process, I listened to the audio recordings as I read through the transcripts. This process was helpful in becoming familiar with the raw data because frequent and repeated exposures to the interviews provided further intimate knowledge of the data.

Phase 2: Initial Codes

Inductive coding was used to capture the ideas presented in the interviews. Rather than utilizing preconceived codes, the coding process allowed the codes to arise from the interviews. As the transcripts were reviewed, important words or phrases were recorded that were relevant to the questions being asked. These words and phrases captured key ideas that the interview subjects were describing during the interview. After initial and secondary codes were produced, initial themes and final themes emerged from the data.

First, I read through the interview transcripts, picking out important words and phrases that conveyed meaning relevant to the interview questions. I opted to use concise codes for this step. The first round of coding produced over 800 initial codes (see

Appendix G). Next, I collapsed codes with similar meanings based on the framework to consolidate codes. For example, *pre-pandemic*, *post-pandemic*, *pandemic*, *before pandemic*, and *COVID* were consolidated into one code: *COVID*. This process resulted in about 250 secondary codes (see Appendix G). These codes helped to show patterns in the interview responses.

Phase 3: Themes

After secondary codes were produced, I tried to reduce the number of ideas to those that represented the most important ideas that emerged from the interviews using commonalities based on the elements of the framework. These commonalities included similar ideas posited by the various participants. Because the interview subjects mentioned many similar ideas, the overlapping concepts were able to be collapsed into groups that represented the many shared ideas. This process produced 20 initial themes (Appendix G).

The framework of emotional intelligence theory provided the backbone of the research questions and the interview questions; therefore, the responses given in the interviews, which were eventually coded, related conceptually to emotional intelligence. After these important ideas about emotional intelligence theory in its relation to soft skills were consolidated into initial and secondary codes, these codes were merged into themes that represented a large number of smaller codes. These themes captured that most important and repetitive data points in the interviews as revealed by the coding process.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

The fourth step involved checking and reviewing themes. The original themes were reviewed to see if they needed to be condensed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As themes were reviewed, they were broken into categories to produce six final themes that most accurately represented the main ideas posited by the interview subjects in answer to the interview questions. These final themes are categories of interview data that may assist in answering the research questions within the research framework:

- COVID
- student success
- deadlines
- emotions
- social interactions
- technology

The evolution from initial themes to final themes with sample responses to clarify the meaning of the final themes are shown in Table 3.

Table 3*Theme Progression*

Initial themes	Final theme	Sample response
COVID, Struggling	COVID	“I ... This is hard. The students were. I mean they were home for what? A couple of years during the pandemic ... they ... it's like they weren't being held to any sort of standard. So now they it's like they're just not sure what professional standards of behavior actually are.” (Participant A)
Coursework, home life, motivation, organization, responsibility, attendance, confidence, persistence, interactive learning, entitled	Student success	“Students don't know how to be students” (Participant C)
time management, unpreparedness	Deadlines	“Their perception of sometimes due dates and feedback can be a little different than the reality of a situation.” (Participant B)
Emotions, mental health, confidence, self-consciousness	Emotions	“They're very vocal about their inability to self regulate themselves. I think it's part of embracing the whole mental health culture that we have now.” (Participant G)
Technology	Technology	“... our technology has caught up with our industry in a lot of way, shapes and forms, they could that I am just as productive, and my numbers show well that there was a opportunity to show I my worth to a company or my worth as a worker, is based on my productivity ... not just my obedience to show up.” (Participant B)

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Every theme was defined and named (Braun & Clark, 2006). The names of the themes closely resembled the wording of the original codes, which were largely representative of the original wording of the participants. Therefore, the themes were organized to reflect the data. The final six themes were COVID, student success, deadlines, emotions, social interactions, and technology. These final six themes are defined as follows:

COVID

During the pandemic, many students and employees became used to performing their daily duties from home. This situation led to lower student expectations and less meaningful student interactions. Social skills were negatively affected.

Student Success

Student success is at the heart of the soft skill/emotional intelligence discussion; students are struggling to develop and maintain a fruitful academic and social life. Students struggle to perform well; this phenomenon may be related to a lack of direction, purpose, and motivation. Students do not always put in the necessary work to achieve academic success.

Deadlines

Students, particularly after the pandemic, have tended to expect flexible deadlines on assignments. Students do not seem to see the importance of turning in assignments on time.

Emotions

Some students struggle with their emotions and mental health, with some students feeling anxious and depressed, particularly after the pandemic. Socializing and giving speeches have been difficult for some as well.

Social Interactions

Some students struggle to interact socially with one another. Other students may not know how to relate to or respect authority figures, such as instructors.

Technology

Students have been negatively impacted by technology in multiple forms. Students are distracted by cell phones, online videos, and computers. Some students struggle to relate to people rather than a device.

Discrepant Cases

Discrepant data, defined here as views of participants that do not agree with the views of the majority of participants, were noted. The views of participant 10 regarding students' emotional intelligence tended to be more positive than the views of the other participants. This was the only instance of discrepant data in the study. This data was retained as a valuable portion of this research study, showing the variation among participants.

Phase 6: Producing the Report

Finally, examples of each final theme from the interview data were produced (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These examples were responses from the interviews that best represented the final six themes. These final themes were taken from the following pieces

of interviews that help to answer the research questions. Some themes answered more than one research question.

Results

The following section outlines how participant responses are related to the themes. Participant quotations will be provided as samples of each theme. This discussion will allow the reader to understand how the final six themes emerged from the data and how these themes relate to the research questions.

Research Question 1

How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in self-awareness among recent college graduates?

Research question 1 was answered by elements of Theme 4, *Emotions*, and theme 3, *Deadlines*.

Theme 4: Emotions

Emotions, and mental health in particular, was a consistent theme throughout the interviews. This theme emerged from discussions about students' emotional states and how this impacted their academic disciplines. Many of the interview participants described student emotional issues.

Student anxiety was said to be high, and COVID was said to have exacerbated the problem in some students. Differences in opinions existed among participants as to whether emotional challenges had increased since lockdowns or whether they had remained the same. Some students' anxiety levels were said to be so high that they would rather take a failing grade than to give a presentation before the class. Participant

A spoke of how she accommodated these students by allowing them to present to a smaller group after class. Students are now tending to speak more openly of their anxiety, and more understanding exists in the classroom about these struggles.

Some instructors believed that a disrespectful attitude toward instructors was a problem, with Participant G citing this issue as a reason that students find emotional outbursts to be acceptable. “They think maybe we need to see them more on a peer level than a student instructor level. So maybe that's why they feel like it's more acceptable to have these outbursts.” Additionally, students were said to be worried about others’ opinions of themselves, with Participant stating that “we live in a very fear based society” and that “we see people doing a lot more avoidance behaviors now than we used to.”

Three of the nursing instructors interviewed mentioned that some individuals tend to go into nursing for empathetic reasons, while others go into the field because of the money. Participant H described a self-assessment inventory that her program utilizes that addresses critical thinking, professional characteristics, communication skills, integrity, stress and coping, understanding the nursing profession, and different learning styles. This tool was said to allow students to be self-aware of their own aptitudes.

However, Participant H said that students and teachers do not seem to take advantage of this inventory, but it does help students with recommendations related to their learning styles. Participant I took note of where she believed some of the emotional issues stem from, saying the following about shy students who may have a history of trauma:

I think that again they bring so much of how they are as an adult is based on how they were raised, how, you know, were abused, or had traumas, and you know and they bring all that with them, and that impacts that ability. And so sometimes, you know, I've got some people that who are excellent, but they're very shy and very afraid to make mistakes because they've been beat down somewhere...I think my job is to motivate and part of my job is to motivate. Make them, you know, come across positively.

Participant J took stock of the emotions of students at a particular school where she taught, believing them to be positive, overall, even if some students were self-conscious in the nursing clinical setting:

I'll have to say, I think they're yeah, they're sensitive, and they're aware. And I think, you know, there's always some that just don't get it...But overall, I think they're, you know, they're pretty, whatever the word would be to say, yes.

Participant J went on to say that she groups students in pairs to mitigate this anxiety. She believed that students do not learn well under pressure. "...How do you learn when you're so paralyzed by fear?" As one who is empathetic toward nervous students, she went on to say that "whatever you can do to keep them more relaxed, or you know, just in a better place mentally that they can actually, you know, process what they're doing. Otherwise, they're frozen in fear." Participant D related a lack of self-awareness to lack of empathy for those around them. Self-awareness was a priority for Participant J because, in her view, it is a big problem if a person is often irritating others, only speaking of himself, and on his phone constantly.

Overall, emotions and mental health was a recurring theme in the interviews. Several participants mentioned the struggles of their students in this area. Although the perspectives of the different participants varied, a consistent theme of mental health and emotions emerged from the data. This theme of *emotions* was shown to answer research question 1.

Theme 3: Deadlines

The theme of *deadlines* brought to light some of the students' issues with self-awareness. Some students struggled to meet deadlines; more specifically, however, students did not seem to understand how lacking academic responsibility can negatively impact instructors. Some students lacked consideration of their instructors and a lack of self-awareness in the area of delinquent assignments. For instance, Participant D said the following:

I think again they're just not really aware maybe like, if you miss a lab like no, you can't make it up, because that means I have to meet you and spend four hours of my time with you and like that doesn't really cross their mind that like, hey, if I miss somebody else has to do something...I could probably see more definitely more gaps in that one as far as not being very self-aware, probably a tendency to be a little more...self-centered then, for just maybe not really paying attention to some other cues around them, as people are...talking about stuff they're more worried about talking about themselves than I would say, or what's going on with them versus listening to kind of which kind of goes into the empathy, too. But Listening to what everybody else is saying I would kind of maybe associate that some with

some of the excuses that I get on why, stuff isn't turned in, or why they haven't done stuff.

Research Question 2

How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in self-regulation among recent college graduates?

Research Question 2 was answered by elements of theme 4: Emotions.

Theme 4: Emotions

Most participants did not perceive a significant gap in self-regulation. According to participants, students did not frequently lash out at instructors or other students. Additionally, emotions seemed to be sufficiently well-regulated to adequately function in the classroom. Interview participants spoke of emotional regulation in students. Some students were said to have emotional outbursts, and others were said to struggle with anxiety or depression. Mental health was a topic brought to light by several participants.

When asked about students' anger, many participants did not seem to note a problem, although some students were said to be disrespectful. Participants B E, F, and G, for instance, all said that they did not seem to have many problems with angry students, with Participant C noting that he sometimes encountered disrespectful students. Participant B, for instance, said that there were "very few times when I say that I really had a student participating in a temper tantrum, or just flat out angry rant at me some kind of way." Additionally, Participant J stated the following:

I think they're pretty self-regulated. Yeah, you know, okay, occasionally you'll have somebody who, you know, is just a hothead. But overall, if anything, they're less

assertive than they should be probably because they're scared...But overall, I think they're pretty good.

Even if anger was not a common issue, elements of anger were present at times. For instance, Participant H and Participant B described their experience with angry and passive-aggressive students: "I feel like the anger that I see most commonly is like a blame game" (Participant H). "We have almost a passive aggressive issue with students, not emailing, not communicating face to face, but they will go to the next in the chain of command and want to have a discussion" (Participant B). Where anger was present, the idea that pain was its root system was recognized: "...anger comes from pain, and if they haven't dealt with that, it will show up as that" (Participant B).

Additionally, angry students may be angry from past events in their lives and may be triggered by consequences such as deadlines for assignments. For instance, Participant B noted the following about the displacement of anger: "A lot of the time, you can recognize displacement if they're having stress at home, stress at work, and they immediately start nit picking...just attributing other things in their past frustrations with high school." This displacement can be "an unconscious process...almost like they're self-sabotaging" (Participant B). Participant B described how she tries to help students who become angry: "I try to remind them that I have, I've listened, I've heard, I've participated. Now I'm going to give you my feedback..." Instant gratification was also said to shorten students' tempers.

Similarly to Participant H, Participant B believed that student baggage from their home lives may influence some of the struggles that students display. The participants also

spoke of the importance of maintain a good working attitude in not displaying unwarranted emotions at work. Participant G noted that “they're very vocal about their inability to self-regulate...” This inability to self-regulate can be problematic in the workforce. He said that there can be less incentive for employees in healthcare to self-regulate because of the many job opportunities. He also contrasted students of previous generations to contemporary students, who tend to be argumentative. He said that there is a current “culture of being expressive.” Participant I shared her viewpoint of argumentative students and how it can be handled by faculty who are new vs. faculty who are experienced.

I have students lash out, you know, through the years; like just last week I had a student who I approach them about leaving their patient and unsafe situation. They're like, “no, I didn't.” And I'm like “I was right behind you. I saw what you did and didn't do,” ...I think when faculty are new and they're challenged by students, sometimes they don't know how to handle it, and I don't because I'm old and done this forever. I think I don't get as challenged as much as maybe I did 30 years ago.

Participant I also shared how she handles confrontational students:

What do you in in that, that you know, most of the students are here fighting for something. They're fighting for a career. They're fighting for a survival in the...situation that they're in...”I appreciate you advocating for yourself, but you know you have to make sure you're right.”

Overall, the interview participants described the emotional state of their students. Some of the issues noted included anger, disrespect, anxiety, and depression. An overlap

between emotions and social interactions exists because some of the anxiety discussed was related to social encounters.

Research Question 3

How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in motivation among recent college graduates?

Research question 3 was answered by elements of theme 1, *COVID*, theme 2, *Student Success*, and theme 3, *deadlines*.

Theme 1: COVID

Students were said to be negatively affected by COVID lockdowns. Students became used to the flexibility afforded by the remote learning platforms. Several interview participants mentioned that the 2020 lockdowns negatively impacted students. Areas of academic performance, motivation, and personal issues were all spoken of.

Soft skills were said to have changed since the pandemic and professional standards are not being upheld due to ignorance. When asked to what she attributed the change, Participant A responded that “it's like they weren't being held to any sort of standard. So now they it's like they're just not sure what professional standards of behavior actually are.” Communication was said to be a problem and anxiety and depression were said to have worsened during COVID. For example, participant A said the following:

I would say that communication, for, not all of them, but a lot of them, is really challenging. Some of them are just fine. They are still thriving, but it's like the students who were previously like, already prone to anxiety or depression, or

some sort of like mental health issue, that has just like ballooned since the pandemic. And they just are almost afraid to interact with other people.

Participant A also spoke of the impact the pandemic had on the social lives of students: “They're sort of a hermit and trying to like pull them out of that shell to get them engaged with others is--with some of them it's almost impossible.” Participant A also said that the lockdowns were “impressionable years” and that students have embraced their mental health issues more since the pandemic. Some participants (A, D, and G) saw the need for students to be held to a higher standard post-pandemic, as certain standards were said to be lessened during lockdowns. For instance, “During the pandemic, they didn't have to attend anything, you know” (Participant A). The same participant described the negative impact of students not being required to show up to class

They really didn't have to put any effort in, and since then, like attendance has been a huge struggle for some of them. They're not sure why they're doing this. Another theory I have is, you know, during that time when it wasn't required to attend, and they just had completion points...no one was really holding them accountable. So they did like incredibly minimal effort. And it all worked out for them. They still pass.

Referring to coursework during the pandemic, participant G said that things were much easier for students. “And it's now trying to break those habits that they developed.” Additionally, Participant A said the following:

Well, I think that during the pandemic, and the semester directly following, we gave so much grace and we should have. I mean, it was a very hard time for everyone. But I've wondered when we're going to return back to some sort of normalcy in holding students accountable to a higher standard.

Another example of post-pandemic performance standards came from Participant D, who said that the idea of hard due dates were brought to the surface in light of the pandemic: "How do we get back to like a due date is a due date?"

Student motivation was one concern noted by the participants. Participant C noticed that there is a lack of motivation following the pandemic. "There's just like a distinct post-COVID student attitude that to me is noticeable." However, this participant also stated that "I don't know necessarily if it is motivation as much as I hate to say it—rampant cheating." Additionally, this participant, a math instructor, noticed that students in recent years tend to lack persistence in working through equations; this lack of problem-solving skill was cause for concern for the employment of his students (Participant C).

Additionally, participant D noticed motivation trends within the past few years: "The last 2 or 3 years, I've seen more students missing classes missing things for work obligations...they're not unmotivated in other areas. They're just not very motivated maybe in the school stuff..." Participant D went on to speak of a shift of priority from coursework to jobs.

Social interactions have been a significant problem post-COVID, with Participants E, F, and H commenting specifically on this phenomenon. For instance, Participant E

described his pre-COVID versus his post-COVID classroom in this way: "...I've noticed anymore, I can't even get students to acknowledge each other's existence." Additionally, Participant F said that "I think that anxiety and depression is through the roof." When asked how COVID has influenced social skills, Participant F said that "those interpersonal skills have definitely taken a hit," with participant H agreeing with that sentiment, noticing that students struggled to show appropriate facial expressions when masks were removed.

Additionally, Participant G said that a healthy fear of instructors seems to be lacking in contemporary students. He said that "...maybe COVID expedited that."

Additionally, Participant H explained her view of the lack of social skills as related to the pandemic:

Maybe they have decent social skills, but because of the anxiety that they have, it impacts their skills to communicate...because of that. And I feel like we've seen a lot more of that since COVID.

Not all effects of the pandemic were negative, however. For instance, some students were excited to be back in the classroom due to a distaste for online classes.

Participant F described her experience of returning to the classroom after COVID with nervousness and excitement co-existing:

I can tell that students were extremely nervous to be back in the classroom, but also very excited, and so many of them said, 'I hate online education. I hate online classes. I am so excited to be back face to face.'...I don't think anything replaces real live face-to-face contact.

Another positive result of lockdowns was increased student empathy. Participant A noticed that her post-pandemic students tended to be more empathetic and kinder than their pre-pandemic counterparts. An example of this phenomenon was that bullying was once a problem; after the pandemic, however, students have not tended to bully their peers. Fellow classmates tend to understand anxiety and depression better now as well, and Participant A said that she also understands her anxious and depressed students better now. Regardless of the negative impacts of COVID, one positive effect mentioned was that students are more kind to one another post-pandemic (Participant A).

Theme 2: Student Success

Student success and *deadlines* are somewhat overlapping themes. In the theme of *student success*, students struggled to meet the higher post-pandemic standards of student behavior, including composing emails and attending classes. Additionally, some students lack direction.

Students were said to be stuck in a pre-pandemic mindset of too much leniency: “They really didn't have to put any effort in, and since then, like attendance has been a huge struggle for some of them...when are we going to turn the page and start holding them to a higher standard?” (Participant A) Participant A went on to say that she helps students succeed by providing accommodations like presenting presentations to smaller audiences. An entitled attitude was considered to be part of the problem for Participants B and D. Additionally, students are bringing the baggage of home life into the classroom, a practice that inhibits them. Baggage from student's personal lives, lack of direction,

and stagnation were three problems of note. According to Participant B, students were said to be stagnant—not moving from a high school mindset to a college mindset.

Participant B also spoke of accountability, consequences, and future employment:

I also think we, just holding certain accountabilities, would also help...like there are consequences. There is accountability, and those are not dirty words. You know, those are things that really implement and hold the line and the and if everything is negotiable, what kind of future employment can we give these people if everything is negotiable, if ethics are negotiable, if behavior is always this, you know, even negative behavior in a classroom is negotiable, I don't know how we're ever going to really make sure that we're getting people in the workplace and good candidates out there and giving, and not only for industry, but for the student to have a good experience in their success, you know we want them to be successful. And we want them to be long term. I mean, there is a reason that currently the majority of people will change career fields...not just jobs, career fields three or four or five times in their lifetime.

Speaking of good qualities like timeliness, making impressions, composing emails, and communicating needs, Participant B noted that “some of this has to start a lot earlier than I get a hold of them.”

Some students struggle to function in their role as student, with laziness, excuses, lack of prioritization, and entitlement being some problems mentioned by some participants. Participant C said that “someone will be organized, but they're lazy. Some of them are hardworking, but they're poorly organized...” Participant D said that she receives

excuses for not turning in assignments and that some students are very unaware of the importance of being in class...They're more worried about what's going on in their life, and everybody should kind of been to or figure out things to help them.”

Participant E said that some students are not prepared for college. “They just they truly don't know what studying a lot means.” Motivation was seen as a problem for some students, but not for all students. Participant F, as a psychology instructor, said that her freshmen students who are “trying to figure out if college is for them” may lack motivation, whereas sophomore students, particularly psychology majors, do not tend to struggle with motivation.

Participant G said that students vary in their degrees of motivation in the classroom:

We have students that are extremely motivated. And you know, they're turning in these assignments. They're asking questions. They're hungry for knowledge, and then on opposite end, you have students that are procrastinating, turning in assignments late, not really asking questions, not seeking out information...

Participant H, a nursing instructor, described her students' motivation as twofold:

“...they have motivation for being the nurse, which is the end result, but the high upkeep of the motivation to study and do the hard work in between is maybe sometimes lacking.” She also saw a difference in students who go into the field for money rather than passion, with the latter group being more motivated in the classroom. Participant H and Participant J both said that it can take an academic disappointment to cause students to understand that they need to change something. Participant J said that motivation can be a challenge when life has more than one can juggle well:

A lot of that depends on their personal situation. There are so many that are working, they're parents, they're, you know, they've got family responsibilities. I think that they're motivated, but I think they're so scattered with a lot of their commitments that it's hard for them to focus on...

Theme 3: Deadlines

Some students were said to struggle with coursework deadlines. The interview participants discussed their views on the possible reasons for this issue. The pandemic was mentioned as contributing to the problem in addition to high school experiences. Time management was also seen as a problem in some of the student population. The idea of academic consequences was discussed as well.

Participant B noticed that some students struggle with deadlines because of their high school experience:

In high school, they are really not taught of academic consequences. If you don't turn something in oh, we'll just turn it in late, and I'll just deduct a few points. Well, in some collegiate classes it's like, no, that was you fail to turn something in, you get a failing grade. And talking about consequences sets people off.

According to Participant D, who spoke of students giving excuses for why assignments were not turned in revealing their lack of self-awareness, said that hard due dates have been an issue since COVID:

So it's kind of been a process to getting it back prior to COVID and everything. You know, I pretty much had hard due dates, and then I drop a couple, you know, if they miss something or did something late, and then, you know, I got a little more lenient

with it. I honestly right now, kind of feel like it's a mess, because I'm trying to give them hard due dates.

Participant F's comments on due dates mirrored those of Participant B's:

"They're shocked whenever you say no, you can't make that up...you're not in high school anymore..." Additionally, Participant F said that there is pressure from the institution to allow students to complete their work so they do not fail: "I'm trying to give them hard due dates...I think there's a pressure from the college as well like we'll let them do their work so they don't fail. That wasn't always there, either."

Participant G also mentioned that some of his own students struggle with turning in assignments on their due dates, and he described different types of students he has seen:

You can have these "type A" personalities turning in things late and then being confrontational about it...or vice versa with, you know, the type B's...loud, outspoken students turn in things late. You'll have quiet students turn things in late, and you'll have the exact same on the other end.

Participant H noted that students may lack in time management in general.

According to some participants, due dates were difficult for some students and the proper academic effort to succeed was not always present. In general, several factors seemed to be involved in the lack of motivation in college students.

Research Question 4

How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in empathy among recent college graduates?

Research Question 4 was answered by theme 4: *Emotions*.

Theme 4: Emotions

Empathy was said to be a part of being able to properly interact with others (Participant F). However, the faculty observed that students may lack empathy in select areas while demonstrating the quality in other areas. Students may have empathy for classmates in their own peer group but may lack empathy for the rest of the student body. Empathy was said to be important in the healthcare field, particularly. Some students were said to lack empathy, while other students may be too empathetic.

Participant A said that she saw students demonstrate more empathy after COVID: “These students, post-pandemic, seem to be more kind, just overall as a whole than the group I had pre-pandemic...” Participant B noted that about half of her students lack appropriate empathy and her view of the formation of empathy in students:

I would even hazard a guess as to 50-50, which is, I think, a very high number, considering that I'm a professor in allied health, which you know, our bread and butter is taking care of people...so you know, empathy too, and seeing things from another person's point of view is...part of raising. It's part of that emotional intelligence and that emotional control when you are rewarded for anything and everything. Or if everything is negotiable.

Participant B believed that learning empathy goes back to childhood and can impact a person in adulthood.

...empathy, emotional intelligence, emotional control to me--I'll kind of come back to some of those communication skills and what they got at home, or what they got in their elementary education. Some things can follow people for a very long time.

Empathy in the culture was said to have decreased (Participant C), and Participant D noted a gap in empathy in her students, relating the problem to selfishness and lack of self-awareness:

I could probably see more definitely more gaps in that one as far as not being very self-aware, probably a tendency to be a little more, I don't know, I guess self-centered then, for just maybe not really paying attention to some other cues around them, as people are, you know, talking about stuff they're more worried about talking about themselves than I would say, or what's going on with them versus listening to kind of which kind of goes into the empathy, too. But listening to what everybody else is saying I would kind of maybe associate that some with some of the excuses that I get on why stuff isn't turned in or why they haven't done stuff. Well, just some of the stuff that they say or that like they're saying, maybe like this is happening.

However, not all participants saw empathy as being severely lacking. For instance, Participant D and E did not see many problems related to empathy in their students, with Participant D stating the following:

I would say, again, there's a little bit, you know, we're talking about the not being very self-aware. So sometimes I don't think they intentionally are not empathetic, but so maybe a little just kind of that disconnect of not paying attention to other people's feelings, but not a huge amount overall.

When asked if this dynamic has changed since she has started teaching, she said that students now seem to desire more empathy for themselves. She also said, echoing

Participant A that “they are definitely more open about their issues.” The idea that students tend to be more interested in what is happening in their own lives and in their immediate circles was brought to light by Participants F and G. Participant F, for example, had her own views on the empathy levels of her students and how self-centeredness and social media play a role:

I think sometimes, again, I think some of them are still very egocentric. Some are still immature and kind of wrapped up in their own stuff so much that if it doesn't relate to them, it doesn't really matter. So like sometimes it's—and this is not always the case—this is just sometimes when you're talking about big, if you're talking about a global issue, if we're talking about something that's going on in Africa, they are so far removed from that it's difficult for them to empathize, because it's not affecting them directly...I would also say that my answers have also changed since social media became so prevalent...so the need for validation is so strong right now...

Participant H said that, as a nursing instructor, she sees that her students go into the profession for empathetic reasons: “...there's always some that are kind of like, they just want to do it for the money. But I would say, a majority of the time, we have students that have been through some type of experience...” Participant J echoed this belief:

I think...they're very empathetic, almost to a fault. In my experience, you know, they really feel for their patients and their families. And they just, you know, that's why they're in nursing. They want to help and make things better. And yeah, I think overall, the students have been extremely empathetic, and there's always some that

you know, maybe they don't have that, but it's very rare, I think, because they wouldn't be in nursing, I don't think, if they didn't have that degree of empathy...I think it sometimes is hidden by stress or, you know, people just being overwhelmed. But I think that's one of the common denominators of nursing students for the most part.

Research Question 5

How do higher education faculty describe soft skill gaps in general social skills among recent college graduates?

Research Question 5 was answered by theme 5, *Social Interactions* and theme 6, *Technology*.

Theme 5: Social Interactions

Although not a universal problem among students, social interactions were a common area where students seemed to struggle according to the interview participants. The participants noted that students may struggle with social interactions with peers and with classroom presentations. With social anxiety being an issue, some students prefer not to speak with their peers in the classroom and may go to great lengths to avoid others. *Social skills* and *technology* are overlapping, as the latter seems to influence (or display the deficit in) the latter. Communication seemed to be an important factor involved with social interactions, and whether certain students truly lacked social skills directly, they still seemed to struggle socially because of their anxiety; this idea provided a bridge between *social interactions* and *emotions*.

Some students were said to be afraid of social interaction since the pandemic, which was an impressionable time for students. Some students who would have dreaded speaking in front of a group had an easier time with written work.

It just scares them to death to interact with other students that they don't know... some of them, their anxiety is just off the charts...the anxiety just won't get out of the way to let them like enjoy interacting with other people (Participant A).

Communication and understanding of oneself was considered to be essential skills, without which “the whole thing kind of just falls apart” (Participant B).

Participant B also stated that people assume that they are good communicators:

There is no linear or logical way that they've ever been taught to communicate a scenario or to communicate their own needs with any kind of self-reflection or feedback. I think there is a terminal loneliness to some of these people, and don't even understand it.

Some students are less social now, while others are glad to be back in the classroom. She also noticed that some students can be socially awkward and unsociable but that they can come out of their shell as the semester progresses (Participant D). Students do not always enjoy group work according to some participants (B and E). For instance, Participant E noticed the following:

This feels like a post-COVID thing where there's a lot of times in my classes where I let people kind of like work together...I've noticed anymore, I can't even get students to like acknowledge each other's existence. You know, it's like I do that, and then they all just sit quietly and nobody talks.

This participant nuanced his view, saying that “it's not like their social skills are poor. I see more of a general unwillingness to open up to people they don't know...” A certain hierarchy emerged when speaking of soft skills, and at some levels, social skills were placed on the top. When asked about what the most important of the emotional intelligence skills is most important for career success, Participant E stated the following:

It would be better if you had all of them, you know, going forward, but you know a baseline of just the self-regulation would be better than nothing...if I had to pick one, I would say, yes, your ability not to blow up in somebody's face because they ask you to do something is probably like a baseline skill I feel like everyone should have who wants to like keep a job for more than 3 months.

Technology was a focus of Participants B and F. The focus of Participant F was social media, while the focus of Participant B was cell phones in general.

Social media also plays a role in the way that students relate to validation: “I'm just going to post what I think people want to see or want to hear.’ And then that's how they get their validation.” According to Participant F, this phenomenon has been occurring for around a decade, with a worsening effect the past 5 years. Additionally, the increase of students on cell phones rather than talking to one another demonstrates that “those interpersonal skills have definitely taken a hit” and that “...I think we see people doing a lot more avoidance behaviors now than we used to.” Similarly, Participant B believed that social skills are lacking in students, and described the relationship between social skills and technology

They want to be on their phones...People are much more willing to engage on an online live chat like a thread versus sitting in a conference room...I think people are also not necessarily comfortable with other people's reactions...I don't think anyone wants that explosive personality being anywhere near them...I recently had to really just say, "Okay, everybody put down your phones. Everybody eyeball to eyeball with me for just a minute."

For Participant F, social skills are one of the most important aspects of emotional intelligence for employability. She told of a student who was book smart but who tended to irritate people. He was told that he would never be hired at a certain clinical site. This participant actually linked social skills with empathy as well: "...if you've got somebody that can interact with other people, and I do think empathy is part of that."

For participant G said that the current political climate has influenced the way students are not afraid to be outspoken with no filter and that "students—especially nursing students—struggle with talking to people who fall outside of the category of individual to whom they would normally converse." Student-teacher relationships, ineptitude in speaking with patients (for nursing students), and social skills were some concerns expressed during the interviews.

Disrespect of instructors was a concern of multiple participants as well (C, G, and H), with participant C saying that students do not treat their instructors as real people. Some participants believed that a certain type of student culture is responsible for many of the problems seen in students rather than the problems being a result of the younger generation only. In other words, traditional and nontraditional students experience the same issues with

disrespect, communication, and social skills (Participant H). Participant H described this issue in the following quotations:

I would say general social skills are lacking among a lot of the students, and it doesn't matter if they are traditional or nontraditional. I think a lot of times, people refer to it as being like a generational issue, and I don't think that it's a generational issue because we have those traditional students, we have the nontraditional students. And it's almost like they're on even playing ground like, it's not a generational gap. I think that texting and social media, the way students talk on social media or whatnot...most of the time, they're respectful, but some of the things that you know I would have never dreamed saying to my instructor, like trying to challenge the authority...

We were talking about earlier, how we think it's just the culture of the student has changed rather than it being like a generational thing. And then something else that we all that I don't know if you could necessarily say it's lacking in the actual social skill. Maybe they have decent social skills, but because of the anxiety that they have, it impacts their skills to communicate...because of that. And I feel like we've seen a lot more of that since COVID. They don't know how to talk to patients, or you know, they don't want to go in there and talk to patients or ask them. I feel like this is probably always been a thing. Communication regarding sensitive topics. Everybody is a little uncomfortable with that...

Additionally, she went on to say that some students had difficulty making acceptable facial expressions after masks were removed. She said that general social

skills—particularly communication—are vital for students, even ranking this category in the top two most important emotional intelligence aspects for students for career success. Communication is key for providing patient safety.” Participant I said that some students are insecure and quiet, while others are confident. While the shy students must build their confidence, it is the overly-confident students who are dangerous.

Participant I also ranked social skills, including communication, as one of the top two emotional intelligence qualities for individuals in the workplace, and said that her older students tend to communicate more proficiently than her younger students due to life experience. Additionally she said that “...if they're not self-aware, then sometimes, you know, they aren't aware of how they communicate or how they come across to people. So it makes them a little bit harder to be a team player.”

She also added that healthcare is not the only field where these skills are needed and why this is the case:

Participant J had an overall positive outlook on student soft skills:

I think, overall, social skills are adequate...sometimes there's not self-awareness that, you know, people have a job of the day to do, and yeah, the students are there, but these other nurse is on the floor, you know, they're busy and they're stressed. And they're under the gun. So sometimes I think that can like roll over to social skills. Maybe students thinking, you know they need more help from people or more consideration, and maybe they get a little miffed sometimes or not as understanding...and I think, yeah, I think, overall, their social skills are fine. Yeah.

There's always a few that maybe you know missed that class from their parents. But there's overall, you know, I have been always happy.

Participant J said that some students struggle with shyness at the clinical site, and her solution is to pair the student with a partner who is confident. Self-awareness was a priority for Participant J because, in her view, it is a big problem if a person is often irritating others, only speaking of himself, and on his phone constantly:

You can't teach people some of this stuff. They've got to be self-aware. And I don't know if it's conscientious, or what the term would be...I had new grads that had come in and sit on their phone and they were good nurses, but they just thought they were, and—that's a good word—entitled. I thought they were entitled to be on their phones. And, boy, that was a big no, no, so stuff like that is I put it under the self-awareness category...but I do think that that's huge to know how you're affecting other people, how people are seeing you, how the families perceive you.

The topic of colleges providing opportunities for socialization was brought up during the interview process. Participant E said that he believes that community colleges are guilty of “not emphasizing that social aspect” of collegiate life that can be beneficial to students. As a whole, the interview participants seemed to agree that some student tend to lack social skills and that this deficit is a problem.

Some ways to mitigate the problem were discussed. The shy students, for instance, were accommodated in some ways. Participant A, in particular, tried to meet students where they are by letting anxious students with fears of public speaking stay behind to give a presentation to a smaller group. According to Participant I, healthcare

curricula have addressed soft skills, including communication, with certain programs over the past decade or more. She found these resources to be helpful.

Interactive classroom styles may be of some help with this problem. For instance, Participant G said the following about flipped classrooms versus traditional classrooms:

Lectures still have their benefits. But with this new group of students, this new culture of students, the thing is nowadays is to interact have some kind of interaction, you know in part due to because cause their attention span is even shorter nowadays than what it used to be for other students. So you know it, it is constantly interact constantly anchor them back to what's being talked about. So I think we try, and I think one of the benefits of that constant interaction is building their communication so hopefully with that shift from lecture-based no or limited interaction...lectures that require communication from student to instructor or student to student that will start to see those rebuilding of communication...

While the student population was the focus of the interviews, the idea that employment is hindered by the lack of social skills was also noted (Participants A, E, H, and I), as “being able to communicate it'll...make your job either easier or if you don't do it will make your job harder” (Participant I). For example, Participant A, when asked about how emotional intelligence influences employment, explained that she was on an interview committee for a position at the college. While many applicants have the correct qualifications, “the social skills have been an issue.” Participant H feared that students may not gain the communication skills they need for the workforce.

Therefore, social interactions were said to be a problem, and group work in the classroom was not considered to be desirable among students, even though some students were even considered to be too social. While data-driven fields do not require the level of social skills as other areas, social skills tend to open more doors for individuals (Participant E). Social skills were considered to be vital, as “professional wisdom is etiquette” (Participant B).

Theme 6: Technology

Several participants noted that students are now involved with technology to the detriment of social interactions. Participant B said that technology has caught up with our industries, and people are viewing working in a different way. Participant C had comments to make about COVID, technology, motivation, and social interactions. This is how he described the students who had dealt with remote learning during COVID:

They said the last thing they wanted to do was do anything on a computer like they've been trapped for two years and they wanted nothing to do with an internet class...they're like, 'I've been trapped at home for two years. I want to go to class.' And so you have that weird sort of motivation like they're desperate for like this all like the social contact they didn't get...

Speaking of social skills, Participant D noticed a change in the way students relate with regard to self-awareness, technology and social interactions:

I think it's changed some, you know, maybe a little bit of lack of self-awareness. There're just some things that they do or that they're used to, you know, being on their phones all the time, or even if they're bringing in a computer and typing some

notes like they're just, some of them are a little less social now. Some of them might kind of feel like it's the opposite. They're so glad to just be around people and happy that they're in the classroom that they, you know, are enjoying themselves.

Participant F spoke of how cell phones have changed the classroom environment:

So when I started teaching in the 1800s, cell phones did not exist. And so before and after class, everybody talked to each other...I can have 15 people sitting in a classroom waiting for it to start, or I can have 40 people in a classroom waiting for it to start, and every single one of them will be on their phones. Yeah. And even if you have, a small little group of girls sitting together that are talking to each other. They're on their phones while they're talking to each other. So yeah, so it's those interpersonal skills have definitely taken a hit.

She went on to describe a potential cell phone experiment:

Actually, yesterday, in Social Psych, I talked to them about possibly doing our own experiment where they give me their phones for a day. They just go without their phones, for you know, for maybe 5 hours, and then write about it. How did that feel? Did you feel anxious? How many times did you catch yourself wanting to grab your phone and check something or text somebody?

Participant F also spoke of how social media has influenced individuals to find their validation on these platforms:

I'm sure some people are legitimate, genuine, but for most people, me included, you know, you post a picture where you don't look good, you delete it and take another one. So there's that constant need for validation that let's post this and see how many

likes I get. And they're correlating that with true life validation instead of, you know, going out and earning something we have this falsehood of I'm just going to post what I think people want to see or want to hear. And then that's how they get their validation, and it's all false.

Participant H described the challenges of nontraditional students with technology and social skills:

At times the nontraditional students are you know... So something else to piggyback off of that is this year—and we probably have a couple every year—we have students coming back that didn't have computers or any technology in school. And now they kind of struggle as far as like social skills and just the fact that they didn't have technology and so that I think would be another aspect that is a little bit challenging. You need a little bit more attention based on them to help them get up to speed, which is the technology component.

Participant I described how technology has negatively influenced nursing students caring for patients:

When computers came in, cell phones came in, then we found that generation of students would walk into a patient room and address the patient, but look at the computer. And you know, so they were, they were treating the computer and not the patient. They were communicating to the computer, not the patient. And that's that started about, you know 10, 15 years ago. It's when you know. But 10 years ago we brought it more into the curriculum. You know has it changed much over the years? Yeah, I think that communicate—they don't communicate well

because they're focused on they're used to communicating electronically. And so with that, now they feel like if they don't have nothing to say or don't have a thought about it, they just don't communicate, so they just don't respond if you send something electronic, and then they have, there's big issues with there's some of their patient load if they're elderly because people don't respond well to people who treat the computer versus them.

Some students were said to be distracted by life events and technology that impeded their success. Participant J said the following about distractions students' lives, including technology:

'Oh, I was getting ready to get married,' and 'I was all busy with that,' or 'I know I need to turn off my phone and turn off Facebook.' And you know all or whatever they're on, they know they're distracted. So there's just I think that's the biggest problem is distractions, really, for a majority of them.

She went on to speak of a lack of self-awareness in social interactions, such as "talking about yourself all day or being on your phone." Finally, multiple participants agreed that at least one of these skills is important in the workforce. Participant B provided a kind of summary by describing how many of these emotional intelligence categories converge in a student's life, and how a certain hierarchy of skills exists:

Without the communication skills and interpersonal, you know, with ourselves, with our...and just the whole thing kind of just falls apart. And what I really found is that those uncommunicated expectations...into disaster. People want to be hired and

move up in a company and move up in and make sure that their work is patted on the back. And that's just not the reality of a situation.

If you are always praised for every little thing, then you're going to expect that. And when you don't get it you feel dejected and sure, and it there is. No, I mean, if there's no brand loyalty here, if people feel dejected and not seen in that heard, they will quit, they will ghost, they will walk out. That is emotional control. Some of that is I think some mental health issues and displacement of their own aggression from different kind of things. But empathy, emotional intelligence, emotional control to me I'll kind of come back to some of those communication skills and what they got at home, or what they got in their elementary education. Some things can follow people for a very long time.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The following section will provide evidence of trustworthiness in this study. The procedures detailed in Chapter 3 were followed to accomplish trustworthiness in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This section will include an explanation of how these strategies were followed to achieve the goal of trustworthiness.

Credibility

In order to provide trust in the results of the study, credibility must be established. In order to establish credibility, it must be proved that what was intended to be measured was measured (Stenton, 2004). First, a review of the audio recordings during the process of correcting the auto-generated transcripts ensured researcher familiarity with the data. Additionally, member checking is one protocol that was utilized to ensure credibility.

Upon the completion of the transcripts, they were sent to the interview participants for review and correction, when necessary (Stenton, 2004).

Additionally, data were recorded, even when it provided explanations contrary to my expectations or to the general thrust of participant opinion. For instance, some participants spoke more positively of students than others and tended to have a more sympathetic tone toward them in their shortcomings. Other participants spoke more harshly of students. Regardless of this disparity and my own personal biases, all data were recorded.

Reflexivity, a process in which the researcher is aware of his or her own biases that may influence the research study (Alder, 2022), was practiced as the study progressed (Stenton, 2004). Personal biases about higher education were noted prior to the research study. My impressions of the interview occurred in real time and were further crystalized as the audio recordings were reviewed and the codes were produced.

Transferability

Through a vivid description of the background setting of the research environment, an increase in transferability will occur (Stenton, 2004). In order to provide this background description, each participant was asked about his or her professional background and current role as an educator. In this way, the reasons that these participants hold the views they do may be understood more adequately; therefore, the transferability of the study is increased by this protocol.

Dependability

Dependability allows for future replication of research studies (Stenton, 2004). In order to maintain a high level of dependability, detailed descriptions of the research process have been used. Additionally, audit trails were used to track the coding process from the initial codes to the final themes, along with corresponding participant quotations.

Confirmability

Confirmability was upheld in this study in order to inhibit researcher bias (Stenton, 2004). Reflexivity, member checking, and frequently coding ideas in participants' own words were techniques utilized to increase confirmability. The member checking protocol, as described in the previous sections, was utilized to eliminate researcher bias. Additionally, participants' own words were often used in the codes. In these ways, researcher bias was mitigated, and the words and ideas of participants were able to be presented with a lower level of researcher interference.

Summary

After data familiarization, the raw data were coded. From the initial codes, secondary codes emerged. Initial and final themes were the end result of the data analysis procedure. By this process, the major foci of the interviews were seen.

The final six themes emerged from the codes and were used to answer the research questions. Research question 1 was answered by elements of theme 4, *Emotions*, and theme 3, *Deadlines*. Research question 2 was answered by theme 4, *Emotions*. Research question 3 was answered by elements of themes 1, 2, and 3: *COVID*, *Student*

Success, and Deadlines. Research Question 4 was answered by theme 4: *Emotions*.

Research Question 5 was answered by theme 5, *Social Interactions* and theme 6, *Technology*.

Chapter 5 contains a detailed interpretation of the findings of the study.

Associated literature will be considered in order to assist in understanding the findings.

The limitations of the study will be explored, and recommendations for future research will be offered. Finally, implications of the study, particularly the prospective positive social change outcomes stemming from this study, will be discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The aforementioned purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore via interviews faculty perceptions of recent college graduates' soft skill gaps as they were manifested in components of emotional intelligence—self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill. Overall, COVID influenced student learning and student emotions. The flexibility that remote learning afforded the students actually handicapped student learning upon the return to face-to-face learning. Students must possess certain qualities in order to be successful in the classroom. Students must be motivated willing to work toward a goal, completing assignments by their deadlines. Due dates must not be seen as flexible but must be understood as concrete. Students struggle with anxiety, depression, and fear of being in front of others. Some students do not possess control of their emotions in the classroom. Students do not always perform well socially, and technology may play a role in this deficit.

Interpretation of the Findings

In several ways, the findings of this research study confirmed what was found in the literature regarding the soft skills deficit. Multiple instructors noticed a deficit in certain areas of soft skills among their students. However, instructors also spoke positively of students' skills.

The operational definition of soft skills was narrowed down using the study's framework. Thus, the interview questions centered on this study's framework, Goleman's five emotional intelligence areas. Some areas seemed to be more positive in the

instructors' views, while other areas seemed to display a gap in skills. The five areas were self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and general social skills.

Self-awareness was described in positive and negative ways by the participants. While one participant said that her students do not think about how their actions such as missing a class may affect others, another participant said that students are able to be in tune with one another's emotional needs resulting from increased anxiety. These ideas expanded upon what Smith et al. (2021) wrote about soft skills playing a role in determining success in life, and they reflected what Goleman (1997) said about skills involving interpersonal interactions being important in maintaining healthy relationships. Additionally, Wisker and Paulis (2015) noted that soft skills are vital in work relationships, which was confirmed by more than one participant. Additionally, the view that real-world skills are lacking (The Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2018) may have been confirmed to some degree by these statements.

A recurring theme in the interviews was that students did not seem to struggle to a great degree with self-regulation. While some students were wont to temper tantrums and emotional dysregulation, most students did not behave this way, according to the instructors. In other words, emotional self-regulation in the context of unwarranted displays of anger did not tend to be a problem for students. This neither confirmed nor disconfirmed any findings in the literature, as emotional regulation did not seem to be a common soft skill to report.

However, when viewed from the perspective of anxiety, many students struggled with self-regulation. COVID, remote learning, and returning to normalcy were cited as

possible culprits for these problems. Each participant had their own viewpoints regarding mental health. For instance, Participant A tended to express sympathy toward her students and explained how she accommodated those who struggled with public speaking. Participant G, however, saw the mental health focus as being a negative symptom of a cultural phenomenon of a “mental health culture.” These differing perspectives can help in seeing similar occurrences from separate vantage points, with Participant A’s observations about public speaking expanding on Saunders and Bajjalý’s (2021) findings that communication is a vital soft skill to possess.

Instructors noted that there was a lack of motivation for academics post-COVID. The ideas that appeared throughout the interviews included were those of leniency and lack of academic seriousness. Instructors said that students were extended a great deal of leniency over lockdown periods and that this leniency shaped them negatively such that postpandemic students struggle with the rigorous nature of the academic environment. The lack of motivation is mostly consistent with the literature, with Participant C expanding on what Payscale’s 2016 study found, namely, that students are not willing to spend much time and energy toward problem solving (Participant B; Payscale, 2016) or engaging in critical thinking and attention to detail (Payscale, 2016). This finding was also consistent with the Society for Human Resource Management (2019), which cited critical thinking and problem solving as among the top skills lacking in job applicants.

One interesting finding was brought to light by Participant B, who stated that in recent years, she had seen a greater number of traditional college students prioritize work over academics. She said that they were not entirely unmotivated, but they did lack

motivation in the classroom. Additionally, the post-COVID student attitude was brought to light by one participant. This is consistent with Payscale's 2016 study that found "grit" as lacking.

As for the question of student empathy, responses varied among participants. One participant stated that she saw students demonstrate more empathy after COVID, and another participant said that her students seem very empathetic. Other faculty noted that some students tend to be selfish and do not pay attention to the feelings of others. One participant said that students tended to be more empathetic within their own social circles but lacked empathy toward the entire classroom. Finally, one participant said that students' empathy varies from one student to the other, with some students being very empathetic and others lacking empathy. This information expanded what was found in the literature, as empathy did not seem to be a widely reported soft skill.

Student social skills were noted as lacking. COVID was cited as a catalyst for this phenomenon. Some students were described as having social anxiety and as isolating themselves, not desiring to do group work. Students did not demonstrate eye contact, listening skills, or etiquette. Some students tended to engage with their phones rather than engaging in appropriate social interactions. The lack of social skills seems to expand upon the literature, which found interpersonal skills as lacking.

One instructor noted that after lockdowns, there had been times when students would not talk in his class. One participant said that more avoidance behaviors tend to exist now in people. Additionally, some students did not know how to make appropriate facial expressions after masks were removed; this phenomenon was a cause of alarm for

one instructor, who saw this as presenting trouble with future employment, a sentiment consistent with the literature (Stewart et al., 2020). Additionally, this lack of social awareness and social awkwardness supports the literature, as Payscale (2019) included communication, interpersonal skills, and teamwork on its list of skills reported as lacking in college graduates.

Furthermore, attention spans were said to be shorter, and a negative student culture of entitlement was said to be present in both traditional and nontraditional students alike. One participant echoed the literature by noting that an interactive classroom presents benefits to students' communication abilities. However, the point was also made by one participant that students do not like group work, confirming the literature that found that teamwork is lacking (Payscale, 2019). One instructor said that she had previous experience in incorporating soft skill training into curricula and that it was a helpful addition. Among all of the negative comments regarding student social skills, Participant J's view that students do not tend to lack in this area was a virtual standalone viewpoint worth noting.

Soft skill training was spoken of positively by Participant I, and Participant G spoke of utilizing an active learning approach to inculcate these skills, echoing common theme in the literature (Martin, 2019, Rao, 2018; Riley & Nicewics, 2022; Valerio, 2022), although whether a "flipped classroom" technique is truly valuable was not entirely consistent in the literature (Betti et al., 2022; Moundy et al., 2022). The idea that soft skills can be taught is consistent with the literature (Gladstone & Brown, 2022; Goleman, 1998).

Additionally, Participant B's sentiment that soft skills must be taught earlier than college age confirmed the view of Chakraborty (2022), who said that soft skills should be taught from a young age, but disconfirmed the view of Bhagra and Sharma (2018) and Munir (2021), who said that soft skills may be acquired at the level of higher education, and the view of Kastberg et al. (2020), who stated that higher education institutions function in the development of emotional intelligence. Participant B, who valued professionalism and etiquette, maintained that she did enforce certain rules of conduct that would fall into the category of soft skills; this view supports the findings of Saunders and Bajjaly (2021), who reported that some faculty in their survey taught soft skills. Additionally, the idea that career success is tied to soft skills is consistent with the literature (Riley & Nicewics, 2022; Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021).

More than one faculty member considered communication to be a highly valued skill, with Participant B believing it to be of paramount importance, a finding consistent with Saunders and Bajjaly (2021) and NACE (2020)—with NACE citing team work as important—but less consistent with ICIMS (2018), which listed other soft skills such as problem solving as being more important to recruiters. Most faculty members interviewed stated that at least one category of emotional intelligence/soft skills was lacking, a finding consistent with the literature (Saunders & Bajjaly, 2021; Payscale, 2019; Stewart et al., 2020). Participant C said that some students were disorganized, a comment that may provide opportunity to expand the body of research, as organization as a soft skill received little attention in the literature reviewed. Finally, multiple participants

believed that a connection exists between at least one of these skills and employment, a viewpoint consistent with the literature review as a whole.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study include transferability and dependability. During the process of gathering data and analyzing responses, no other items were noted that would limit the study in addition to those limitations previously discussed. Regardless of the limitations mentioned, this study is thought to make a positive contribution to the knowledge base in the field of education in the area of soft skills as they relate to emotional intelligence.

This study took place in the Midwestern region of the United States, which may limit the study's application to the rest of the country and the world. With a relatively small sample size due to the use of a basic qualitative design, the faculty perceptions described in this study may not be representative of all faculty members more broadly. Furthermore, because of the subjective nature of the topic of the study, significant bias and truthfulness may present an issue. The faculty members likely had their own experiences that shaped their particular viewpoints. Additionally, my own biases were a limitation in that I favor classical liberal arts education, a form of higher education that is exceedingly rare in colleges today, including my study site. However, I was aware of this bias as I embarked on the study, and I did not allow my bias to influence my reporting of the data.

With the instructors teaching various disciplines and having differing life experiences, the limitation of sample size was mitigated. In other words, because of the

diversity of the instructors sampled, the limitation presented by a small sample size was somewhat reduced. Truthfulness issues in the participants and participant and researcher biases may have been present; however, I recorded the instructors' views as presented despite my own biases and whether or not I concurred with their perspectives.

Recommendations

According to the literature review and the research data, soft skills are of vital importance for individuals going into the workforce. Unfortunately, these skills are not always well-represented in the student population, many of whom will soon be in the workforce. The data collected reinforced the ideas that the literature review presented, namely, that soft skills are imperative and that they are lacking. Other researchers may utilize this study and expand upon its scope in order to gain more insight into soft skills and emotional intelligence in higher education graduates by utilizing a few recommendations.

Soft skills, viewed through the lens of emotional intelligence theory, need to be cultivated in the current student population. Ideas of cultivating these soft skills were mentioned in the literature and in the participant responses. Active learning was a consistent theme in the literature, and it was also spoken of in this study. While this solution was not spoken of by most participants, at least one participant mentioned engaging students with an interactive classroom. Participant B said that some of these skills must be taught earlier in a student's life than college. A test that evaluated soft skills was brought up by one of the nursing faculty. However, she said that it was not widely utilized except for determining learning styles.

A similar study may be performed using a larger sample size. Additionally, a wider range of disciplines could be represented. One idea for a future study would be to ask instructors to evaluate their students on soft skills and ask the students, themselves, to evaluate themselves on those same soft skills. This procedure might show whether students lack self-perception of their own deficiencies.

This type of study could be furthered by interviewing job placement center employees who regularly work with individuals seeking employment. These individuals may have further insight on what is lacking in the newly graduated population. If college faculty members and career center employees were both interviewed, the two groups could be compared and contrasted with respect to their viewpoints on student and employee soft skills. These ideas may be used to increase understanding of these concepts.

Implications

Potential Impact for Positive Social Change

This study acts as a confirmation of the information presented in the literature review. These interviews shed light on this topic; educators have stated that soft skills within the framework of emotional intelligence are lacking. The positive outcomes of soft skills and their importance were seen in the literature review.

Perhaps college and university leaders may take note of this study so that this gap in soft skills may be improved upon and closed. As was seen in the literature review, some ideas such as active learning have been utilized to improve soft skills; however, a

gap remains. Ideas emerging from these interviews may show this problem more clearly so that it can be improved.

If this soft skills deficit is improved, a more effective workforce could result. Students who are graduating from higher education institutions may be more prepared than they would have been otherwise. As one participant mentioned, perhaps the trouble begins earlier in life. This study may help parents and teachers of primary and secondary educators. In this way, students may be able to have the best advantage that soft skill training would afford them, with potential positive results in their future careers.

Business productivity, reduced unemployment, and employee job satisfaction may be some positive results of this study if this study is utilized to improve upon the problem addressed. If the ideas found in this study are expanded in ways described above, perhaps a positive result will occur within universities and the student and employee population. In this way, the student and employee landscape would be improved.

Implications for Theory

This study has allowed familiarization with Goleman's theoretical framework as it relates to soft skills. The overlap between soft skills and emotional intelligence is significant. The theory is a good fit for this study about soft skills, as soft skills and emotional intelligence are intimately intertwined.

The results of this study show how emotional intelligence manifests itself in the student population. Perhaps in the future, the overlap between emotional intelligence theory and soft skills should be explored further, with a study comparing and contrasting

the way these two terms are used and what skills are generally accepted as being in each category.

This study may supply a way to expand upon emotional intelligence theory in its connection to soft skills. With soft skills and emotional intelligence being able to be used so closely together, a future study could focus on either what makes them distinct or what makes them identical, depending on the view of the researcher. Research of this sort may help to advance emotional intelligence theory.

Implications for Practice

Higher education faculty are influential in their students' lives, and through their interventions, perhaps a positive change may occur within the classroom culture. For instance, if soft skills were prioritized to the degree that hard skills are prioritized, then these valuable skills may not be so lacking in the student and workforce population.

Following are some recommendations for practice:

- Perform soft skill evaluations in classrooms.
- Initiate institution-wide policies that seek to inculcate soft skills in students.
- Encourage dialogue among higher education and the workforce to understand what skills employers desire in their employees; these very skills can be emphasized in classroom learning.
- Provide continuing education for faculty related to soft skills.
- Provide resources targeting specific age groups in their soft skill learning.
- Develop a research department focused on soft skills development in higher education students.

- Implement classroom organizational structures that may more easily foster the learning of soft skills.
- Relegate certain time in the classroom to learn and practice workforce soft skills.
- Integrate a soft skill focus across disciplines.
- Utilize soft skill and emotional intelligence testing to gauge where students need improvement.
- Encourage active learning.
- Set up academic soft skill coaches who specialize in teaching soft skills to the student population.

Conclusion

The focus of this study was that of soft skills viewed through the lens of emotional intelligence. As seen in the literature review, soft skills have been considered lacking in new college graduates. Because of the relationship of soft skills to employability, the problem was worth addressing through personal interviews of higher education faculty. With emotional intelligence theory as the theoretical lens, the level of soft skills in the student population was explored by speaking with these college instructors.

This study was warranted because of the serious nature of the soft skills deficit. With soft skills providing benefits for employment and with job satisfaction and company outcomes being negatively influenced by employee soft skills deficit, this is shown to be a worthwhile topic. In this study, instructors who were used to spending time with

students who will be in the workforce within a few years were well-qualified to speak about what they see in this population with regard to soft skills.

With soft skills being a vital category for students and employers to master, help may be needed in this area to adequately prepare students for the workforce. Without such skills, these students may experience the negative outcomes associated with a lack of soft skills, as listed above. With the help of this study, educators may be able to understand what problems higher education institutions are facing with this deficit in student skill levels and the detrimental outcomes of this deficit.

A particular handicap that became a refrain among these interviews was that of the COVID-19 pandemic. This time period, beginning in 2020, proved to begin a period of social isolation for many students who were used to being in the classroom. The instructors who were interviewed in this study noted a distinct post-COVID attitude in their students. While technological advances had begun this social isolation trend before the pandemic, it was COVID that proved to be a kind of a tipping point for academia.

Students who were used to being at home were now being forced to go back to school in a brick-and-mortar classroom for the first time in many months. Additionally, with academics becoming less stringent over the time period of the pandemic, students were not used to the level of rigor that accompanied their new face-to-face classes. Instructors spoke of how difficult it can be to handle a class or students who are not used to the traditional classroom and its requirements.

In addition to the academic requirements that proved to be overwhelming for students, the social isolation factor was also significant. According to instructors, anxiety

and mental health issues also seem to be problematic for students. Several students struggle with group situations and do not know how to interact with one another. Cell phones have become ubiquitous, relegating student life to one of isolation, even in a crowded classroom.

Perhaps, now, more than ever, is the time where soft skill and emotional intelligence training is essential for higher education students who are recovering from social isolation. Some students may not have a natural affinity for these social skills that are so vital in the soft skill/emotional intelligence scheme; therefore, they need to be trained in these skills so that their academic lives and their future employment do not suffer. These students who struggle need to be helped. The question remains: what will help?

While active learning has been posited as a solution to the soft skill deficit, a definitive answer was not given by the instructors interviewed for this study. One participant spoke of how she accommodated her students' anxiety issues, and another instructor spoke of how she maintained a certain level of formality and structure. Many ideas were discussed, by no certain conclusion was arrived at. Perhaps with a future study built upon this one, more definitive solutions to help students learn and maintain these vital career-making skills will be presented.

References

- Abbott, D. (2019). Assessment and feedback. In J. J. Walcutt & S. Schatz (Eds.), *Modernizing learning: Building the future learning ecosystem* (pp. 203–222). Advanced Distributed Learning Initiative.
<https://adlnet.gov/assets/uploads/Modernizing%20Learning.pdf>
- Adler, R. H. (2022). Trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Human Lactation*, 38(4), 598–602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08903344221116620>
- Akers, R. L. (1973). *Deviant behavior: A social learning approach*. Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Akers, R. L. (1990). Rational choice, deterrence, and social learning theory in criminology: The path not taken. *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*, 81(3), 653–676. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1143850>
- Arteaga-Cedeño, W. L., Carbonero-Martín, M. Á., Martín-Antón, L. J., & Molinero-González, P. (2022). The sociodemographic-professional profile and emotional intelligence in infant and primary education teachers. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(16), Article 9882.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19169882>
- Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2018). *Research: Fulfilling the American dream: Liberal education and the future of work*. Selected findings from online surveys of business executives and hiring managers.
<https://www.aacu.org/research/fulfilling-the-american-dream-liberal-education-and-the-future-of-work>

- Bandura, A. (1963). Social reinforcement and behavior change—Symposium, 1962: 1 Behavior theory and identificatory learning. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 33(4), 591–601. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.1963.tb01007.x>
- Barnes, E., & Gearin, C. (2022). How millennials approach leadership in higher education. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 21(1), 53–67. <https://doi.org/10.12806/V21/I1/R4>
- Bar-On, R. (1997). *The emotional quotient inventory (EQ-i): A test of emotional intelligence*. Multi-Health Systems.
- Betti, A., Biderbost, P., & García Domonte, A. (2022). Can active learning techniques simultaneously develop students' hard and soft skills? Evidence from an international relations class. *PLoS ONE*, 17(4), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0265408>
- Bhagra, A., & Sharma, D. K. (2018). Changing paradigm of employability skills in the global business world: A review. *IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, 12(2), 7–24.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Butakor, P. K., Guo, Q., & Adebajji, A. O. (2021). Using structural equation modeling to examine the relationship between Ghanaian teachers' emotional intelligence, job satisfaction, professional identity, and work engagement. *Psychology in the Schools*, 58(3), 534–552. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22462>

- Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 25(8), 652–661.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987120927206>
- Campos-Uscanga, Y., Reyes-Rincón, H., Pineda, E., Gibert-Isern, S., Ramirez-Colina, S., & Argüelles-Nava, V. (2022). Running in natural spaces: Gender analysis of its relationship with emotional intelligence, psychological well-being, and physical activity. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(10). <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19106019>
- Ceri-Booms, M., Curşeu, P. L., & Oerlemans, L. A. G. (2017). Task and person-focused leadership behaviors and team performance: A meta-analysis. *Human Resource Management Review*, 27(1), 178–192. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2016.09.010>
- Chakraborty, M. (2022). Importance of imbibing soft skills in children from a tender age. *IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, 16(1), 37–43.
- Collins, M. (2021). Mind the gap: Harnessing soft skills on the road to success. Are experienced presidents more effective? *Workforce Solutions Review*, 12(2), 31–33.
- Continisio, G. I., Serra, N., Guillari, A., Simeone, S., Lucchese, R., Gargiulo, G., Toscano, S., Capo, M., Capuano, A., Sarracino, F., Esposito, M. R., & Rea, T. (2021). Evaluation of soft skills among Italian healthcare rehabilitators: A cross sectional study. *Journal of Public Health Research*, 10(4), 65–71.
<https://doi.org/10.4081/jphr.2021.2002>

- Davidson, K. (2016, Aug 31). Management: Hard to find: Workers with good 'soft skills.' *Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/management-hard-find-workers-with-good-soft/docview/1815275735/se-2>
- Dean, S. A., & East, J. I. (2019). Soft skills needed for the 21st-century workforce. *International Journal of Applied Management and Technology* 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.5590/IJAMT.2019.18.1.02>
- Dell'Aquila, E., Vallone, F., Zurlo, M. C., & Marocco, D. (2022). SG-ACCORD: Designing virtual agents for soft skills training in the school context. *Education Sciences*, 12(3), 174. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12030174>
- Deming, D. J. (2017). The growing importance of social skills in the labor market. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 132(4), 1593-1640. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjx022>
- Dirkx, J. M., & Mezirow, J. (2006). Musings and reflections on the meaning, context, and process of transformative learning: A dialogue between John M. Dirkx and Jack Mezirow. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 4(2), 123–139. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541344606287503>
- Donovan, Sarah A. (March 31, 2022). Skills gaps: A review of underlying causes and evidence. *Congressional Research Service*.
- Dziob, D., Górska, U., Kołodziej, T., & Čepič, M. (2022). Physics competition to inspire learning and improve soft skills: A case of the Chain Experiment. *International Journal of Technology & Design Education*, 32(1), 413–446. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10798-020-09620-y>

- Edward Shin, & Jang Hyun Kim. (2022). The Metaverse and video games: Merging media to improve soft skills training. *Journal of Korean Society for Internet Information*, 23(1), 69–76. <https://doi.org/10.7472/jksii.2022.23.1.69>
- Evrensel-Inanç, E., Aydoğmuş, C., Metin-Camgöz, D., & Özdilek, E. (2022). For Generation Z: What is the underlying reason between emotional intelligence and depression relationship? *Sosyoekonomi*, 30(53), 27–48. <https://doi.org/10.17233/sosyoekonomi.2022.03.02>
- Feinstein, J. S., Adolphs, R., Damasio, A., & Tranel, D. (2011). The human amygdala and the induction and experience of fear. *Current Biology : CB*, 21(1), 34–38. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2010.11.042>
- Freshwater, D. (2020). Commentary: An overview of the qualitative descriptive design within nursing research. *Journal of Research in Nursing : JRN*, 25(5), 456–457. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987119881060>
- Gardner, H. (2017). Taking a multiple intelligences (MI) perspective. *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 40, e203. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X16001631>
- Geraedts, H., Bencheva, N., Albuquerque, A., Karampidis, K., & Papadourakis, G. (2022). A framework to enhance students' soft skills within the context of international engineering project collaboration. *2022 31st Annual Conference of the European Association for Education in Electrical and Information Engineering (EAEEIE), Electrical and Information Engineering (EAEEIE), 2022 31st Annual Conference of the European Association for Education In*, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1109/EAEEIE54893.2022.9820308>

- Gladstone, M., & Brown, S. (2022). Soft skills in a hard world: Why emergency management and business continuity leaders must update their professional toolbox. *Journal of Business Continuity & Emergency Planning*, 15(3), 225–236.
- Glogowska, M. (2011). Paradigms, pragmatism and possibilities: mixed-methods research in speech and language therapy. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 46(3), 251–260.
<https://doi.org/10.3109/13682822.2010.507614>
- Goleman, D. (1997). *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. Bantam Books.
- Goleman, D. (1998). What Makes a Leader? *Harvard Business Review*, 76(6), 93–102.
- Grimmer, C. J. (2021). Employing soft skills to drive change. *Professional Safety*, 66(12), 14–15.
- Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B. N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science & Medicine*, 292.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523>
- Hu, X. (2017). Enrollment challenges at liberal arts colleges: A literature review. *Higher Education in Review*, 1–12.
- ICIMS. (2018, January 17). Why soft skills are more important than ever before. 2018, January 17. iCIMS. <https://www.icims.com/blog/why-soft-skills-are-more-important-than-ever-before/>

- Ismail, Z.-A. (2022). Soft skills requirements in e-complaint project team to support facilities management at Malaysian polytechnics. *Property Management*, 40(3), 302–320. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PM-09-2020-0063>
- Jardim, J., Pereira, A., Vagos, P., Direito, I., & Galinha, S. (2022). The soft skills inventory: Developmental procedures and psychometric analysis. *Psychological Reports*, 125(1), 620–648. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294120979933>
- Kabiri, S., Choi, J., Shadmanfaat, S. M. (Shamila), Ponnet, K., Lee, J., Lee, S., & Donner, C. M. (2021). Learning to play through pain and injury: An examination of Social Learning Theory among Iranian athletes. *Social Science Quarterly (Wiley-Blackwell)*, 102(1), 343–361. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12878>.
- Kaiafas, K. N. (2021). Emotional Intelligence and Role-Modeling Nursing's Soft Skills. *Journal of Christian Nursing*, 38(4), 240–243. <https://doi.org/10.1097/CNJ.0000000000000881>
- Kastberg, E., Buchko, A., & Buchko, K. (2020). Developing emotional intelligence: The role of higher education. *Journal of Organizational Psychology*, 20(3), 64-72. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jop.v20i3.2940>
- Kniaz, H., & Chukhno, O. (2021). English trainee teachers' perspective on soft skills development in Ukraine. *Arab World English Journal*, 299–313. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/call7.21>
- Konobeiev, A., Usanova, V., & Gilmutdinova, O. (2022). Developing soft skills in adult learners of English in online courses: The case of Skyeng online school and Skyes

digital platform. *Research Papers in Language Teaching & Learning*, 12(1), 188–202.

Love, P., Edwards, D., & Wood, E. (2011). Loosening the Gordian knot; the role of emotional intelligence in construction. *Engineering, Construction and Architectural Management*, 18(1), 50–65.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/09699981111098685>

MacDermott, C., & Ortiz, L. (2017). Beyond the business communication course: A historical perspective of the where, why, and how of soft skills development and job readiness for business graduates. *IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, 11(2), 7–24.

MacKenzie, L. (2021). A study to match United States Virgin Island employers' job skill requirements with marketing curriculum and course development at the University of the Virgin Islands. *IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, 15(2), 21–44.

Manan, S. A., David, M. K., & Haidar, S. (2021). Soft skills, policies, practices, and self-assessment: Employability challenges and opportunities of university graduates in Pakistan. *Journal of Educational Sciences & Research*, 8(1), 117–140

Marjanovikj-Apostolovski, M. (2019). Communication skills which increase students' employability: Are we teaching the skills they need? *Journal of Languages for Specific Purposes*, 91–99.

Martin, T. N. (2019). Review of student soft skills development using the 5Ws/H approach resulting in a realistic, experiential, applied, active learning and teaching pedagogical classroom. *Journal of Behavioral & Applied Management*, 19(1), 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.21818/jbam.19.1.3>

- Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D. R., & Salovey, P. (2016). The Ability Model of emotional intelligence: Principles and updates. *Emotion Review*, 8(4), 290–300.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073916639667>
- Mayer, J. D., DiPaolo, M., & Salovey, P. (1990). Perceiving affective content in ambiguous visual stimuli: a component of emotional intelligence. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 54(3–4), 772–781.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.1990.9674037>
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., Caruso, D. R., & Sitarenios, G. (2003). Measuring emotional intelligence with the MSCEIT V2.0. *Emotion*, 3(1), 97–105.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/1528-3542.3.1.97>
- McSweeney, B. (2021). Fooling ourselves and others: confirmation bias and the trustworthiness of qualitative research – Part 1 (the threats). *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 34(5), 1063–1075.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JOCM-04-2021-0117>
- Medvedeva, O. D., Rubtsova, A. V., Vilkova, A. V., & Ischenko, V. V. (2022). Digital monitoring of students' soft skills development as an interactive method of foreign language learning. *Education Sciences*, 12(8), 506–N.PAG.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci12080506>
- Melchiorre, M. M. (2019). A marketing course and the liberal arts: Students' perspective of interdisciplinary relevance. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, 12(4), 79–86.
- Mezirow, J. (1998). On Critical Reflection. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 48(3), 185–198.

- Morozova, M., Fasolko, T., Poliuha, V., Veselska, L., & Bagration, K. P. (2022). Training communication and conflict resolution soft skills in students. *Apuntes Universitarios: Revista de Investigación*, 12(3), 236–252. <https://doi.org/10.17162/au.v12i3.1113>
- Moundy, K., Chafiq, N., & Talbi, M. (2022). Digital textbook and flipped classroom: Experimentation of the self-learning method based on the development of soft skills and disciplinary knowledge. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, 17(7), 240–259. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v17i07.28933>
- McCrary, S. C. (2022). Accounting curricula: Soft skills at the expense of technical competency or a happy merger of the two? *Journal of Education for Business*, 97(3), 204–212. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08832323.2021.1910115>
- Munir, F. (2021). Do the engineering education institutions provide soft skills Education? views of South African engineering professionals. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 35(4), 162–179. <https://doi.org/10.20853/35-4-4264>
- NACE Staff. (Jan 13, 2020). Key attributes employers want to see on students' resumes. *National Association of American Colleges and Employers* (Jan 13, 2020). <https://www.nacweb.org/talent-acquisition/candidate-selection/key-attributes-employers-want-to-see-on-students-resumes/>
- National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. (1979). *The Belmont report: Ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research*. U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services. <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmont-report/index.html>

Ramnanan, N. (2022). *Developing soft skills: Faculty and employer perspectives and recommendations* (Order No. 29065820). Available from Dissertations & Theses @ Walden University. (2649510599). <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/developing-soft-skills-faculty-employer/docview/2649510599/se-2>

Riley, J., & Nicewicz, K. (2022). Connecting with Gen Z: Using interactive improv games to teach soft skills. *Marketing Education Review*, 32(2), 97–104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10528008.2022.2041440>

Patil, A. B. (2021). Empowering strategies for learners to improve English communication and soft skills. *Ilkogretim Online*, 20(1), 2538–2545. <https://doi.org/10.17051/ilkonline.2021.01.287>

Patwardhan, P., Kerr, G., Patwardhan, H., Kelly, L., Habib, S., Mortimer, K., & Laurie, S. (2022). Ad agency leadership in the US, UK, and Australia: A mixed-method analysis of effective attributes and styles. *Journal of Advertising*, 51(2), 223–239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2021.1891159>

Payscale (2016). 2016 Workforce skills preparedness report. <https://www.payscale.com/data-packages/job-skills>

Pierrakos, O., & Stottlemeyer, E. (2019). Liberal arts engineering education: Reflecting on the past and envisioning the future. *2019 IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference (FIE)*, *Frontiers in Education Conference (FIE)*, 2019 IEEE, 1–2. <https://doi.org/10.1109/FIE43999.2019.9028604>

- Rao, M. S. (2018). Soft skills: Toward a sanctimonious discipline. *On the Horizon*, 26(3), 215–224. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OTH-06-2017-0034>
- Rodrigues, S. M., Schafe, G. E., & LeDoux, J. E. (2004). Molecular mechanisms underlying emotional learning and memory in the lateral amygdala. *Neuron*, 44(1), 75–91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2004.09.014>
- Saeger, K., Diemer, K., Finley, L., Hutchinson, G., Lammers, M. A., McCune, K., Mitchell, R., O, C. M., Orr, D., Schoenrock, R., Stout, M. T., Stanislawski, D., Sydow, S., Wickam, M., & Wiedmaier, C. (2019). The business education advantage for closing the employability skills gap. *CTE Journal*, 7(1), 25–35. https://www.thectejournal.com/uploads/1/0/6/8/10686931/saeger_summer_2019.pdf
- Salamone, F. A. (2021). Ability tests. *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health*.
- Saldaña, J. M. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Salovey, P., & Mayer, J.D. (1990). Imagination, cognition and personality: Emotional intelligence. *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 9(3), 185–211. <https://doi.org/10.2190/DUGG-P24E-52WK-6CDG>
- Savinova, Y., Sivtseva, N., & Latysheva, S. (2019). E-learning resources as a means of developing engineering students' soft skills. *ELearning & Software for Education*, 3, 95–101. <https://doi.org/10.12753/2066-026X-19-149>

Saunders, L., & Bajjaly, S. (2021). Direct instruction of inter- and intrapersonal skills for business education. *Journal of Education for Business*, 1–8.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/08832323.2021.1997884>

Saunders, L., & Bajjaly, S. (2022). The importance of soft skills to LIS education. *Journal of Education for Library & Information Science*, 63(2), 187–

215. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jelis-2020-0053>

Segura Rondan, L. C., Cadenillas Alborno, V., Zavala Alfaro, F. E., Zavala Alfaro, B.

S., & Arellanos Tafur, O. N. (2022). Soft skills and digital competencies in

teacher professional development in times of a COVID-19

pandemic. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education*, 14(1),

64–73. <https://doi.org/10.9756/INT-JECSE/V14I1.221009>

Sheoran, S., Chhikara, S., & Sangwan, S. (2019). Exploring relationship of family

variables on intrapersonal intelligence of young adolescent girls. *Indian Journal*

of Positive Psychology, 10(2), 79–82.

Sherine, A., Ayyadurai, S., Joseph, S. M., & Edapallikunnel, J. J. (2021). The role of

communication skills in acquiring soft skills for nurses. *Review of International*

Geographical Education Online, 11(10), 529–537.

Shin, E. & Kim, J. H. (2022). The metaverse and video games: Merging media to

improve soft skills training. *Journal of Korean Society for Internet*

Information, 23(1), 69–76. <https://doi.org/10.7472/jksii.2022.23.1.69>

- Smith, M. G., Randle, E., & Bowers, S. T. (2021). Using service-learning and the DEAL model to develop students' soft skills upon career entry. *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal*, 14(3), 1–11.
- Society for Human Resource Management. (2019). The global skills shortage: Bridging the talent gap with education, training and sourcing. Alexandria, VA.
- Srebren Dizdar. (2017). Attempt to overcome the crisis in humanities from the viewpoint of literary studies in the 21st century information age. *Društvene i Humanističke Studije*, 2(1 (2)), 33–65.
- Sternberg, R. J., Cicchetti, D., Luthar, S. S., & Burack, J. A. (2021). “Social policy and intelligence” redux: a tribute to Edward Zigler. *Development & Psychopathology*, 33(2), 522–532. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579420000693>
- Sternberg, R. J. (2015). Successful intelligence: A model for testing intelligence beyond IQ tests. *European Journal of Education and Psychology*, 8(2), 76–84. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejeps.2015.09.004>
- Stewart, C., Marciniak, S., Lawrence, D., & Joyner-McGraw, L. (2020). Thinkubator approach to solving the soft skills gap. *American Journal of Management*, 20(2), 78–89. <https://doi.org/10.33423/ajm.v20i2.3000>
- Surmiak, A. (2018). Confidentiality in qualitative research involving vulnerable participants: Researchers' perspectives. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 19(3), 393–418. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-19.3.3099>

- Tang, K. N. (2019). Beyond employability: Embedding soft skills in higher education. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology - TOJET*, 18(2), 1–9.
- Teng, W., Ma, C., Pahlevansharif, S., & Turner, J. J. (2019). Graduate readiness for the employment market of the 4th Industrial Revolution: The development of soft employability skills. *Education & Training*, 61(5), 590–604.
- Thompson, K., Conde, R., Gade, M., & Mims, T. (2021). An immersion approach to client-sponsored projects: Preparing students with soft skills required for hiring -- face to face & virtual methods. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 10(2), 42–61.
- Thonney, T., & Montgomery, J. C. (2019). Defining critical thinking across disciplines: An analysis of community college faculty perspectives. *College Teaching*, 67(3), 169–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2019.1579700>
- Tsang, T. L. (2019). A quantitative analysis examining differences between US humanities and STEM students' propensity toward innovation. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 43(2), 149–165. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1357069>
- Usta, S. Y. & Fatma Tezel Şahin, F. T. (2022). Preschool history geography curriculum and its effects on emotional intelligence. *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies*, 9(2). <https://doi.org/10.52380/ijpes.2022.9.2.616>
- Van de Voorde, M. (2020). University education in crisis? Transdisciplinary approaches in the arts, humanities & sciences. *Cadmus*, 4(2), 265–272.

- Valerio, C. L. (2022). Active Learning as a facilitator to develop soft skills in teaching Project Management: Approach from a preliminary study during the COVID-19 pandemic. *2022 17th Iberian Conference on Information Systems and Technologies (CISTI), Information Systems and Technologies (CISTI), 2022 17th Iberian Conference On*, 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.23919/CISTI54924.2022.9820401>
- Veleva, M. (2020). Best practices as opportunities for leadership soft skills improvement in human resource management in Bulgarian tourism organizations: The Four Season Hotels example. *Izesstia, Journal of the Union of Scientists - Varna, Economic Sciences Series*, 9(3), 63–71. <https://doi.org/10.36997/IJUSV-ESS/2020.9.3.63>
- Varo, C., Jiménez, E., Solé, B., Bonnín, C. M., Torrent, C., Lahera, G., Benabarre, A., Saiz, P. A., Fuente, L., Martínez, A. A., Vieta, E., & Reinares, M. (2019). Social cognition in bipolar disorder: the role of sociodemographic, clinical, and neurocognitive variables in emotional intelligence. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 139(4), 369–380. <https://doi.org/10.1111/acps.13014>
- Walton, M. (2021). Soft skills interventions and three intervening “considerations.” *IUP Journal of Soft Skills*, 15(3), 23–29.
- Woodard, E. W. (2018). *Soft skills, in turn: An exploratory qualitative study of soft skill development through individual internship experiences in a workplace setting* (Publication No. 10784634) [Doctoral dissertation, The George Washington University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Zhang, Q. & Hao, S. (2022). Developing a mechanism of construction project manager's emotional intelligence on project success: A grounded theory research based in China. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.693516>

Почивалова, Ж. Г. (2022). СИСТЕМА НЕПРЕРЫВНОГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ КАК ИНСТРУМЕНТ РАЗВИТИЯ «HARD SKILLS» И «SOFT SKILLS» У ОБУЧАЮЩИХСЯ ПРАВОВОГО ВУЗА. (Russian). *Contemporary Higher Education: Innovative Aspects / Sovremennaiia Vysshaia Shkola: Innovatsionny Aspect*, 14(1), 48–53. <https://doi.org/10.7442/2071-9620-2022-14-1-48-53>

Appendix A: Interview Introduction

Thank you for volunteering your time to provide information for this research study. The purpose of this qualitative study will be to explore faculty perceptions of soft skill gaps in components of emotional intelligence-- self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills--among recent college graduates. The interview will last about 45 minutes. I will audio record the interview process with your permission. Feel free to answer questions honestly, and if you at any point do not wish to continue the interview, you are free to express that fact, and the interview will be discontinued without any problems. After the interview, I will transcribe our conversation in writing, and I will provide you a copy for review. At that point, within a period of 7 days, you are welcome to amend any of your responses that you deem to be inaccurate.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Note: The relevant research questions are in parentheses following the question.

Thank you for your time.

I am Bryce Wiley, a doctoral student at Walden University. Today we will be talking about soft skills among recent college graduates. Soft skills are noted as lacking among recent college graduates. My goal is to identify soft skills gaps so we can do a better job in higher education teaching soft skills. I will ask you about five areas of soft skills which are components of Goleman's emotional intelligence theory. If you would consider recent graduates—graduates within the past two years—and tell me about what you view as lacking in each area. First, tell me a little bit about yourself. What is your job title? How long have you worked in this job? Are you familiar with the concept of soft skills?

OK. Thanks for sharing. Now let's talk about what you observe about soft skills.

What specific gaps do you observe among recent graduates in self-regulation? Self-regulation, according to Goleman, is the ability to control one's anger. (RQ 2)

What about self-awareness? What particular gaps do you observe among recent graduates in terms of self-awareness? The way Goleman defines self-awareness is the ability to understand one's own emotions and the way these emotions relate to others. So, what gaps do you note? (RQ 1)

Motivation is another component of emotional intelligence. Goleman focuses on internal motivation. What individual elements of motivation do you observe lacking among recent college graduates? (RQ 3)

Empathy is another area. What abilities related to empathy have you observed among recent college graduates? (RQ 4)

General social skills are another component of emotional intelligence. What social skills are lacking could be improved among recent college graduates? (RQ5)

We have discussed five components—self-regulation, self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and general social skills. Which of these areas do you feel is most important for graduates' employability?

You provided specifics about that component—repeat for just-in-time member checking—which of these specifics do you consider most important for graduates' employability?

Are there any questions you have for me that we have not yet discussed? Thank you for your time. I will email you a copy of the transcripts of this interview for review. Please return any corrections to me within one week.

Appendix C: Member Checking Protocol

1. Interview participants
2. Transcribe the audio recordings
3. Have participants approve transcript
4. Note any additional data from participants
5. Analyze transcripts using 6-step thematic analysis

Appendix D: Recruiting Email

To whom it may concern:

I am a student researcher in the Ed.D. program at Walden University, and I am conducting a qualitative research study regarding the reported lack of soft skills in higher education graduates. I plan to conduct interviews of college faculty to determine the views of such qualified individuals on this topic. I would like to request your participation in this study. Your participation would take the form of an interview lasting between 45 minutes and one hour. If you would be willing to participate in my study, please confirm by replying to this email.

Thank you.

Bryce Wiley

bryce.wiley@waldenu.edu

(618)-663-5271

Appendix E: Site Authorization Email

Bryce,

I am fine with your request and would be interested in discussing your findings.
Please keep me posted.

Thanks,

(President's Name)

President

(Name of College)

Appendix F: Initial Codes

Before pandemic	Higher standard	Struggling
Post-pandemic (2)	Motivation (4)	qualifications
Home learning	Attend class	social skills
Professional standards	Completion points	good fit
Interpersonal communication	Leniency	Not successful
Communication (5)	More empathy	Societal standpoint
Challenging (3)	open	Professional relationships
Thriving	Bullies	Professional demeanor
Anxiety (6)	Understands	Stress
Depression (3)	Interact	pressure
Mental health issue	Social skills	Good communication
Pandemic (5)	lacking	Uncommunicated expectations
Afraid to Interact	Scared	active listening
engaged	interact	reassessing
Interactive (2)	Increased anxiety	technology
Group work (2)	Written communication	attention span
Impressionable years	Speak	showing up on time
Stayed at home	Group	Attendance
Pre-pandemic (2)	Presentations	Ask questions
Mental health	Skip class	Passive aggressive
Embraced anxiety	Anxiety attack	avoidance
Motivation to Attend	Stay After Class	Chain of command
Didn't Show up	Accommodating	Displacement
Minimal Effort	Confidence	Self-sabotaging
Accountable	Skipping	
	Avoiding	

High school experience	University preparedness	Assumed
Collegiate environment	Aware	reality vs. perception
Rationalization	conversation	due date
Coping mechanism	Empathy	feedback
Frustrations	Shortcomings	tread lightly
Home life	Returning students	express
Temper tantrum	Leadership	easily angered
Stress	improve	frustrated
Home	worry	dejected
Due dates	stuck in their ways	cheerleader
Past frustrations	accomplish	effort
Anger	leadership skills	listen
pain	point of need	feedback
Self-sabotage	you statements	good listeners
High school	Time management	frustrated
Academic consequences	Falling short	shutting down
Emotional handicapping	Try harder	heard
Self-reflection	fruitful	feedback
Feedback	Understanding	open
distracted	Deadlines	care
Failing grade	Pay attention	ask
triggered	Respond	care
Excuse	Listening	listen
Shortcomings	Feedback	answer
Collegiate format	Shortcomings	open
High school mindset	Honest	empathy
Collegiate mindset	affirmation	build trust

connect	Dreams	Office culture
willing	Talent	Current Generation
ask question	Learning styles	Creativity
complain	Differences	Social skill
empathetic	Public school system	Listening skills
Point of view	Work	Looking people in the eye
Ethical	Culture	Etiquette
Raising	Divergent	Collaborative opportunities
Rewarded	Career Longevity	All-text classroom
Negotiable	Self-fulfillment	Engage
Treat people	Journey	Online
Don't care	Pathway	Live chat
Culturally	Fitting the Mold	Reactions
Easily	Disillusioned	Explosive personality
Accessible	Academic system	Replying
Temper	Society	phones
Willingness	Dejected	Eyeball to eyeball
Patience	Ego	Assuming
Attention span	Silent quitting	Good Communicators
Instantaneous gratification	Working from home	Ask Question
Delaying gratification	Life work balance	Result
Lack of Direction	Boundaries	Linear
Fear of Unemployment	Company cultures	Logical
Previous generations	Technology	Communicate
Demystifying Institutions	Productive	Self-reflection
Work gratification	Obedience	Feedback
	Show up	

Terminal loneliness	Future employment	Emotional maturity
Not happy	Negative	disrespect
Bored	Behavior/negotiable ethics	Instructor disrespect
Classroom	Workplace	Inappropriate
Phones	Success	View of Instructor
Entertains	Change Jobs	Classroom size
Escape route	Hierarchy	Post COVID vs. pre COVID
social skill	Communication skills	Social change
Talk to Coworker	Interpersonal	Lack of motivation
Strategy	Uncommunicated	Remote learning
Giving	Expectations	asking
Punctuality	Hired	student attitude
Communicate	Patted on the back	trapped at home
need	Reality	emotionally stunted
Tools	Praised	authority figure
Facilitated	Dejected	culturally
Starts Earlier	Brand loyalty	empathy
Failure	Dejected	athlete
Success	quit	resignation
Elasticity	emotional control	persistence
Resilient	mental health issues	employability
Adversity	displacement	quit
Challenges	aggression	hire
Stress	communication skills	fight through
Accountabilities	home	budgeting time
Consequences	elementary education	doing too many steps at once
Negotiable	anger	

don't know how to be students	Disconnect	Subduing
organized	Not paying attention	Few self-awareness issues
lazy	Feelings	Lack of goals
hard-working	Oversharing	Motivated
remedial classes	Phones	Inertia
discipline	Social	Transition
self-teaching	Socially awkward	High school
good students	Struggled	Success
horrible student	Classroom game	Flexibility
freedom	Groups	Responsibility
Anger Issues	Interact	Don't show up
Self-awareness lacking	Late	Drifting
Self-centered	Environment	Studied
Paying attention	Anxious	Talented
Talking vs. listening	Public	Taking the reins
Due date excuses	Stresses	Closing gaps
Attendance	Self-conscious	Float through
Alternatives to attendance	Home	Low-level performance
Self-motivated	Acceptable excuse	Oblivious
Student athletes	time management	Cheated
Commitments	Due date	Bombed
Jobs	Internet trouble	Pass
COVID	Seriousness of due dates	Delusional
Traditional students	Missing class	Address the problem
Nontraditional students	Unaware	Prerequisite courses
Responsibilities	Miss a meeting	One-on-one
	Anger Issues	

Whole class	Discussion-oriented course	Traditional student
Waste of time	Unwillingness	Young
Meet in middle	Open up	Scheme of life
Developmental courses	Warm up	Industrious
Catch-up work	Group commiserating	Private self
College level	Forced social circles	Social self
Foundational courses	Group	Judged
Successful	Opportunity	Looking inward
Excuses	Choosing social circle	Motivation issues
Homework	Community college atmosphere	Maslow's Hierarchy
Online software	University environment	Egocentric
Immediate feedback	Social	Immature
Mindlessly cheating	Lonely	Removed
Laziness	Miserable	Difficult to empathize
Unaware	Opportunities to socialize	Validation
Unpreparedness	Baseline expectations	Falsehood
Lying to themselves	Social structure	Social media
Don't know how to be student	Anger issues	Cell phones
Autism	Not employable	Interpersonal skills
Empathy issues	Good social skills	Cell phone experiment
No social skills	Opens doors	Nervous
Post-COVID	Available	Excited
Participation	Blow up	Online education
Nobody talks	Baseline skill	Face-to-face contact
COVID	Few Anger issues	Old school
Social interactions		Isolation
		Uncomfortable

Social settings	Consistent	Ask why
Social anxiety	Few anger issues	Reading instructions
Employed	COVID	Type A personalities
Leaving the nest	Mixed bag	Confrontational
Reluctant	Emotional statements	Late assignments
Fear-based society	Peer-level	Stayed motivated
Avoidance behaviors	Instructor respect	selective empathy
Coddled	Acceptable	large classroom
People skills	Cultural shift	social
Interact	Student mindset	quiet
Good employee	Healthy fear	talkative
Increasing disparity	Argue	social skills lack
High functioning	Irrelevance	bedside manner
Low functioning	Remote work	strangers
Go-getters	Easier	nonverbal language
Parenting styles	Larger quantity	verbal language
No child left behind	Due date flexibility	COVID
Due date	Rigorous	Outspoken
High school	Back to normal	Filter
Easier	Polar opposites	Reminders
Self-regulation lacking	Motivated	Cultural gaps
Cry	Hungry for knowledge	Peer age
Vocal	Procrastinating	Peer groups
Inability	Late assignments	Admitting
Mental health culture	Self-regulating	Difficulty talking to people
Emotions	Upset	
Expressive	Angry	Opens them up

Lectures	More help	Bad habits
Interactive learning	Full time	Open attitude
Attention span	Family	Self-assessment inventory
Emotional self-regulation	Struggling	Critical thinking
Incentive	Isn't working	Professional characteristics
Leaving employment	Study skills	Communication skills
Employment availability	Testing skills	Integrity
Greener grass	Asking for help	Stress and coping
Don't care	Aware	Learning styles
Overwhelms	Pep talk	Struggling
Lack of motivation	End result	Problem-solving
Drop out	Motivational upkeep	Time-management
Experience	Bare minimum	Self-esteem
Empathetic	Get by	Utilize
Emotional intelligence	Fall behind	Significance
IQ	Senioritis	Empathy present
Soft-skill reemergence	Goal	Social skills lacking
Anger	Holding hand	Traditional students
Blaming	Dreading	Nontraditional students
Blame game	Break	Not Generational issue
Self-anger	Employment	Generational gap
Poor grades	Money	Texting
Pointing fingers	Increase in pay	Social media
Lacking time management	Comfortable	Authority of instructor
Culture shock	Cutting corners	COVID
Big picture	Teachable	Sensitive topics
	Workforce	

Facial expressions	Younger students	Rethink
Masks	Older students	Aware
Technology	Life experience	Coming across
Disrespectful	Jobs	Appear
Multi-generational classroom	Relationships	Hesitant
Leadership skills	Families	Overly-confident students
Effective communication	Hasn't changed	Timid students
Confident	Overly-empathetic	Consistent
Self-regulation	Don't care	Fair
Soft skills	Reading audience	Fighting for a career
Emotional intelligence	Receptive	Appreciate
Come to the front	Talking vs. reading others	Bully
Graduate students	Listen	Ducks in a row
Associates	Body language	Survive
Licensure program	Evaluations	Reserved
Computers	Trainable people	Shy
Cell phones	Not aware	Dangerous
Poor communication	Reactions	Traumas
Electronic communication	Peers	Survive
Don't respond	Improvement	Front/presentation
Communications declined	Raised	Social skills
Purpose	Abused	Coming across
Passion	Traumas	Honest
Motivated	Afraid	Painful
	Mistakes	Team player
	Beaten down	Aren't aware

Soft skills in curriculum	Distractions	Emulate
Resources	Understand	Role model
Acronyms	Flunk	Intimidating
Introduce yourself	Wake-up call	Relieved
All industries	Failure	Supervision
Open a door	Fair	Under the gun
Read people	Academic prowess	Got their back
Wide range	Maneuver	Learners
Self-regulated	Skill set	Nervous
Scared	Underprivileged	Paralyzed by fear
Hothead	Minority-based program	Attitude
Angry	Extremely empathetic	Management
Sensitive	Feel	Nervous student
Aware	Make things better	Sweating
Family responsibilities	Care	Relaxed
Motivated	Hidden by stress	Better place
Scattered	Busy	Mentally
Commitments	Stressed	Frozen in fear
Focus	Social skills	Phone
Slide through	Parents	Conscientiousness
Pay attention	Wreck	Entitled
Experience	Shaking	Stand around
Limited	Self-conscious	Perceive
Circumstances	Unsure	Thoroughness
Traditional students	Look stupid	Lowest common denominator
Deep learning	Tough	Get by
Don't pass	Confident	

Slide through

Get by

Survival

So much

Time-related

Get to know

Balance

Sit back

Let others

Positive

Measure up

Jaundice

Sympathetic towards
students

Ministry

Attitude

Challenges

Requirements

Extra work

Unpaid

Motivations

Altruistic

Praying

Positive feedback

Constructive feedback

Appendix G: Secondary Codes

Leadership	Open	instructor
Communication	Care	COVID
Team work	Trust	motivation
Challenging	Willing	remote
Mental health	Ethical	athlete
Engaged	Rewarded	resignation
impressionable	Don't care	persistence
attendance	Easily	quit
effort	Accessible	organized
accountable	Patience	lazy
coursework	Gratification	remedial classes
understand	Talent	discipline
lacking	Learning	self-teaching
Accommodate	Differences	student performance
Confidence	Public school	freedom
Struggling	Divergent	commitments
Qualifications	Self-fulfillment	traditional students
Society	Journey	nontraditional
Technology	Fitting the mold	students
Reassessing	Disillusioned	disconnect
Chain of command	Work-life balance	environment
Self-sabotaging	Productive	self-conscious
Higher education	Obedience	subduing
Coping mechanism	Creativity	inertia
Home life	Etiquette	transition
Self-reflection	Assuming	flexibility
Distracted	Result	responsibility
Excuse	Logical	drifting
Aware	Bored	low-level
Improve	Classroom	performance
Stuck in their ways	Entertains	pass
Goals	Strategy	delusional
Need	Giving	prerequisite courses
Time management	Punctuality	waste of time
Deadlines	Tools	unpreparedness
Honest	Facilitated	autism
Affirmation	Starts earlier	warm up
Assumed	Success	opportunity
Reality vs.	Resilient	Lonely
perception	ethics	Anger
Heard	Hierarchy	Available
Participated	inappropriate	Maslow's Hierarchy

Egocentric	Lectures	Receptive
Immature	Interactive learning	Body language
Removed	Incentive	Evaluations
Validation	Greener grass	Reactions
Falsehood	Overwhelms	Peers
Interpersonal interactions	Drop out	Traumas
Excited	Experience	Mistakes
Old school	Emotional intelligence	Appreciate
Isolation	IQ	Bully
Uncomfortable	Blaming	Survive
Leaving the nest	Culture shock	Dangerous
Reluctancy	Big picture	Front/presentation
Avoidance behaviors	Isn't' working	Resources
Coddled	Study skills	Acronyms
Increasing disparity	Bare minimum	Open a door
High functioning	Senioritis	Wide range
Low functioning	Break	Sensitive failure
No child left behind	Employment	Scattered
Inability	Money	Commitments
Emotions	Comfortable	Limited
Expressive	Teachable	Circumstances
Consistent	Bad habits	Wake-up call
Mixed bag	Self-assessment inventory	Fair
respect	Critical thinking	Maneuver
Acceptable	Professional characteristics	Skill set
Student mindset	Learning styles	Underprivileged
Argue	Problem-solving	Minority-based program
Irrelevance	Time-management	Busy
Larger quantity	Utilize	Wreck
Rigorous	Significance	Self-conscious
Back to normal	Generational	Role model
Polar opposites	Sensitive topics	Intimidating
Hungry for knowledge	Facial expressions	Relieved
Angry	Masks	Under the gun
Reading instructions	Disrespectful	Got their back
Type A personalities	Self-regulation	Attitude
empathy	Soft skills	Management
quiet	Come to the front students	Relaxed
talkative	Passion	Entitled
Filter	Reading audience	Perceive
Reminders		So much
Admitting		Positive

Jaundice
Ministry

Requirements
Extra work

Altruistic
Praying

Appendix H: Initial Themes

Mental health	Attendance
Coursework	Confidence
Struggling	Technology
Home life	Time management
Deadlines	COVID
Motivation	Persistence
Organization	Self-consciousness
Responsibility	Unpreparedness
Interpersonal interactions	Emotions
Interactive learning	Entitled

Appendix I: Final Themes

Technology	Deadlines
COVID	Social Interactions
Student Success	Emotions