FACTORS INFLUENCING SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT.
A STUDY OF STUDENTS IN UCSI UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Employers today are generally not satisfied with the quality of fresh graduates that graduate from university. Universities are no longer a vehicle for students to acquire academic knowledge but one to help develop life skills as well. So what are the graduate employability skills that the industry is talking about? This study was conducted on the students of UCSI University in Kuala Lumpur to find out the types of soft skills that are lacking amongst students and to find out what can contribute to the learning and development of such skills. The soft skills highlighted to be studied include communication skills, leadership skills, time management and emotional intelligence. This is the criterion variable. These are also the skills sighted by the industry as lacking amongst fresh graduates. This paper examines if personality, peer relationship, attitude towards school and emotional intelligence play a part in helping these students develop and sharpen their soft skills. This is the predictor variable. These factors are chosen because students spend more than half of their undergraduate journey in university, attending classes, learning from lecturers, making new friends and interacting with peers. This paper seeks to find out if these factors play a role in the development of soft skills amongst students.

The survey was conducted on students with a match done with their supervisors to find out if what students say about themselves match what supervisors observe through their work. A moderating factor of culture was included in this study to find out if there is any moderating effect of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism and femininity/masculinity on the relationship. Factor analysis was done on the independent variables, dependent variables and moderating variables to see the factors emerging from the questionnaire and to summarize the variables. Then a reliability test was conducted on all the
three variables to see if the measures are reliable and free from error. Finally hierarchical regression analysis was done on all the variables to determine if there is a direct effect of the independent variable on soft skill development with a moderating effect of culture.

The findings are as a guide for the university to look into introducing programmes, workshops to aid student learning and effectively embedding the graduate attributes in the current curriculum. Interestingly, the results showed that there is no direct correlation of the independent variables to soft skills development but there is a moderating effect of culture on the independent variables and soft skills development.

Keywords: soft skills, student development, employability, graduate attributes
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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1  Summary of soft skills lacking among graduates  8
Table 1.2  UCSI University Graduate Attributes  11
Table 3.1  Source of questionnaire and Cronbach Alpha value  47
Table 4.1  Profile of respondents  53
Table 4.2  Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (Independent Variable)  58
Table 4.3  Summary of factors for Independent Variable  58
Table 4.4  Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (Dependent Variable)  60
Table 4.5  Summary of factors for Dependent Variable  61
Table 4.6  Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (Moderating Variable)  62
Table 4.7  Summary of factors for Moderating variable  62
Table 4.8  Reliability Coefficients for Independent Variable  63
Table 4.9  Reliability Coefficients for Dependent Variable  64
Table 4.10  Reliability Coefficients for Moderating Variable  64
Table 4.11  Hierarchical Regression results using Uncertainty Avoidance as a Moderator in the relationship between personality, peer relationship, attitude towards schools, emotional intelligence and the development of soft skills  67
Table 4.12  Hierarchical Regression results using Individualism/Collectivism as a Moderator in the relationship between personality, peer relationship, attitude towards schools, emotional intelligence and the development of soft skills  72
Table 4.13  Hierarchical Regression results using Masculinity / Femininity as a Moderator in the relationship between personality, peer relationship, attitude towards schools, emotional intelligence and the development of soft skills.  73
### Table 4.14
 Hierarchical Regression results using Power Distance as a Moderator in the relationship between personality, peer relationship, attitude towards schools, emotional intelligence and the development of soft skills.

| Table 4.14 | Hierarchical Regression results using Power Distance as a Moderator in the relationship between personality, peer relationship, attitude towards schools, emotional intelligence and the development of soft skills. | 74 |
**LIST OF FIGURES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.0 Personality as a possible factor for soft skills development</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.1 Framework for research</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.0 Link between new variables and old variables</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF GRAPHS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship between Uncertainty Avoidance and Attitude towards Studies on Soft Skills Development</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship between Uncertainty Avoidance and Attitude towards School on Soft Skills Development</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship between Uncertainty Avoidance and Self-Esteem on Soft Skills Development</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Relationship between Power Distance and Self-Esteem on Soft Skills Development</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF GRAPHS</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Statement of problem</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Significance of the study</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Research Questions</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Research Objectives</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Scope of the study</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Organization of study</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Soft Skills</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Peer Relationship</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Personality</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Factors relating to school</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Cultural Orientation</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Research Framework</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9 Hypotheses</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3  RESEARCH METHODOLOGY  39
3.1  Introduction  39
3.2  Questionnaire Design  39
3.3  Sampling and Procedure  40
3.4  Data Collection Procedure  43
3.5  Selection of measures  45
  3.5a  The Big 5 Personality Traits  45
  3.5b  School Attitude Assessment Survey  45
  3.5c  Emotional Competence Inventory  46
  3.5d  Peer Relationship  46
  3.5e  Cultural Dimension Item  46
3.6  Data Analysis Technique  47
  3.6a  Factor Analysis  48
  3.6b  Reliability Test  49
  3.6c  Descriptive Statistics for demographic  49
  3.6d  Hierarchical Multiple Regression  50

CHAPTER 4  RESEARCH RESULTS  52
4.1  Introduction  52
4.2  Demographic  52
4.3  Factor Analysis  56
  4.3.1  Factor analysis for Independent variables  57
  4.3.2  Factor Analysis for Dependent variables  60
  4.3.3  Factor analysis for Moderating variables  61
4.4  Reliability  63
4.4.1 Reliability for independent variables 63
4.4.2 Reliability for dependent variables 64
4.4.3 Reliability for moderating variables 64

4.5 Multiple Regression 65

4.5.1 Hierarchical regression analysis with moderator 67

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS 77

5.1 Findings 78
5.2 Implication of findings 83
5.3 Limitations of study 84
5.4 Suggestions for future research 85
5.5 Conclusion 85

REFERENCES 87

APPENDIX 1 Survey Questionnaire – Supervisors 91
APPENDIX 2 Survey Questionnaire – Students 96