

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.20055393

STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING SOFT SKILLS TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE THE FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE

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Received: 02/04/2026

Accepted: 23/04/2026

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the perceptions of first year university students in Saudi Arabia about the relevance of soft skills, such as self-management, emotional resilience, communication, and adaptability, in overcoming academic and social challenges they face, whilst helping them to overcome and overcome such challenges during their transition into university life, where Self-Regulation Theory (SRT) is employed to explore the ways in which students can utilize these skills to self-regulate and overcome such academic and social challenges. The study employed a descriptive-analytical research design, and a structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 376 female students at a Saudi university. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis showed that all four soft skills had a significant impact on student perceptions of their capability in overcoming the first-year challenge, with adaptability being the best predictor. Self-management, emotional stability, and communication skills were also important in coping with academic stress, adapting to the university setting, and facilitating social integration. These results demonstrate the need to incorporate soft skills training into academic programs and extracurricular activities in higher education institutions, particularly emotional resilience and adaptability, which help individuals achieve academic success, social inclusion, and overall well-being.

KEYWORDS: Self-Management, Emotional Resilience, Communication, Adaptability, Self-Regulate Theory.

1. INTRODUCTION

The transition from secondary school to university is a significant milestone in the academic and personal growth of students. First-year students are especially exposed to various academic, social, and emotional challenges as they adjust to new settings in learning, handle academic demands, and coping with different social settings (Li & Lee, 2025; Mulaudzi, 2023). Although academic knowledge is considered a key to success, soft skills such as self-management, emotional resilience, communication, and adaptability are increasingly viewed as essential for enabling students to overcome these obstacles and succeed in the university environment (Khalid et al., 2024; Ngo, 2024). Such skills are not only essential in academic achievements but also influence the social integration and emotional well-being (Bora & Altun, 2025).

In Saudi Arabia, adapting to university life will be more challenging due to local cultural and societal pressures that have a significant impact on student adaptation. These cultural aspects introduce another level of complexity to their academic and social adaptation (Alshammari, 2024). Although soft skills have been identified as important in academic success across the world, the attitudes of Saudi students toward these skills and their capacities to meet academic, as well as social challenges are under-researched. Current studies have only explored Western school settings, and the issue of how cultural beliefs in Saudi Arabia can influence the learning process of students regarding the significance of soft skills remains unexplored (Khalid et al., 2024; Muammar & Alhamad, 2023). Moreover, the role of soft skills in university education and co-curricular activities at Saudi universities has not been discussed sufficiently, and the institutions were not given any specific instructions on how to help students develop in a holistic manner (Malik et al., 2020; Mwita et al., 2023).

In the past, soft skills have been mainly explored with standalone interventions, which include micro learning modules, coaching programs, and digital readiness models (Luo & Li, 2025; Mohammed & Ozdamli, 2024). These measures have the propensity of overlooking the views of the students on the applicability of these competencies to the big picture of the university life. Although research has investigated the relationship of soft skills with academic performance, the impact of soft skills in people's social assimilation, emotional stability and psychological well-being which are the key elements of a thriving experience in a university, has not been widely studied (Abdelrahman et al., 2025; X. Wang et

al., 2025). This is particularly important in regards to the country of Saudi Arabia where the issues of the students are determined by unique cultural aspects and social pressures.

This study aims to fill this gap by looking at the perceptions of Saudi first-year university students on the significance of soft skills in solving both academic and social challenges. The research will specifically take into account self-management, emotional resilience, communication and adaptability in dealing with the complexity of the university life in the students. The present study is innovative as it pays attention to Saudi Arabia, a place with its own cultural and educational dynamics, and also to the analysis of the interaction between academic success and social integration two major aspects of the first year of a student that have often been researched separately (Casali et al., 2024; Khalifah, 2023).

This research is motivated by the increasing awareness of the importance of soft skills as a determinant of academic success and social adaptation of people (van den Beuken et al., 2025). Whereas universities in Western settings have started to effectively instill these skills in courses, Saudi Arabian institutions have been lagging in instilling soft skills in their academics and extra-curricular courses (Bindawas, 2024). This gap supports the necessity of the research that will involve discussion of how Saudi students might consider the significance of these skills and how they help to address the challenges of university life.

On the theoretical level, the research will make a contribution to the growing literature on the understanding of the concept of soft skills in non-Western educational contexts. The findings will give the more profound understanding of how the cultural factors influence the way the students perceive and use soft skills (Zahn et al., 2025). In practice, the study will provide the practical recommendations that can be adopted by the Saudi universities to ensure that the students will achieve success in their academic, emotional and social life by integrating soft skills training into their programs and co-curricular programs. This study will help bridge this gap and consequently result in the development of interventions that will be able to improve student retention and mental health, as well as overall academic outputs.

The research project is aimed at investigating how first-year students perceive the importance of the concept of soft skills in dealing with academic and social challenges during their introduction to higher education in Saudi Arabia. The investigation will be focused on self-management, emotional resilience,

communication, and adaptability with the purpose of finding out which of these skills the students themselves identify as the most essential on success. The paper will provide specific information on how these skills will help students to address academic stress, build social relations, and integrate into the life of the university (Lan, 2023). Lastly, the research targets the practical guideline towards Saudi universities in order to promote the practice of cultivating the soft skills within the university curriculum and support services to advance the academic, emotional and social well-being of students. Self-regulation as defined by Self-Regulation Theory (SRT) is inherent to the successful practice of soft skills such as time management and emotional resilience to allow students successful navigation of the academic and social demands of university life (Zimmerman, 2000).

The study will contribute to the existing academic literature on the importance of soft skills in the first-year experience and offer an academic input, as well as offer practical information to the Saudi universities. Based on these results, interventions will be designed and could help students address the issue of insufficient soft skills and become successful both in their academic life and personal life (Zadorina *et al.*, 2023).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction To Soft Skills and Their Role in Higher Education

Soft skills are most essential constituents in the development of students in higher education. Self-management, emotional stability, communication and adaptability are some of these competencies which are quite critical in overcoming academic, social and emotional difficulties in university life (Mwita *et al.*, 2023). As first year students left secondary school and entered the university, they had new realities in which they had to be not only knowledgeable but also possess good interpersonal and personal skills (Osafo *et al.*, 2025). The competencies will help the student manage academic stress, social relationships, and fit in a broad range of environments that make up the significant part of the overall success (Srem-Sai *et al.*, 2025). Soft skills, therefore, play a vital role in student performance, and hence present a vital area of focus in the study as well as in the university programs (Liu & Wee Hoe, 2024). Such soft-skills are even more crucial in ensuring the academic performance and individual growth in general within the context of Saudi universities where students are typically exposed to a combination of the extraordinary cultural and

social forces (Aamir & Strachan, 2024).

2.2. Self-Management Skills' Impact on Students' Perceptions of Soft Skills

Self-management skills of time management, goal setting and stress reduction are the foundations of academic success and personal well-being (Fu *et al.*, 2025). These competencies are particularly important when working with first-year students in Saudi universities when they are balancing their university work with their social interaction and cultural acculturation procedures (Alshammari, 2024). Students with a good self-management system are more capable of managing the challenges in the university, including deadline management and addressing the academic pressure (Mulaudzi, 2023). It has been demonstrated that students who believe that self-management is a necessary skill are more likely to show a higher academic performance and experience greater success in tackling not only academic but also social-related issues (Stan, 2021). Self-management can make a significant difference in the world of Saudi Arabia, where the academic setting can be quite strict, and students need to consider the significance of soft skills because they directly impact their readiness to learn at university and fulfill its requirements (Khalifah, 2023). Self-management skills, which play a key role in Self-Regulation Theory (SRET), are fundamental in helping students to control time, establish academic targets, and overcome stress. Zimmerman, (2000) observes that self-regulation is a dynamic process that involves the students having a positive control of their behavior, cognition, and emotions to attain success in the long run.

2.3. Emotional Resilience and Its Role in Overcoming First-Year Challenges

Emotional resilience refers to the capability to overcome failure and adjust to the stressful experiences (Bora & Altun, 2025). Emotional resilience is crucial to newly enrolled students in Saudi universities because they encounter high pressure in school and social life. Students require the capacity to address academic pressure, cope in the future, and stay motivated to be well and integrate into society (Muammar & Alhamad, 2023). Resilience is a major factor that determines academic achievement and survival of social life in the University that is especially difficult in a cultural diverse environment such as in Saudi Arabia (Abdelrahman *et al.*, 2025). Researchers have demonstrated that, emotionally resistant students tend to have a better view of the significance of soft

skills in solving first year challenges (Mulaudzi, 2023). This means that emotional resilience may be significant in how students in their view feel the soft skills to be significant in enabling them to properly navigate their university lives.

2.4. Communication Skills and Their Impact on First-Year Success

In universities, communication skills are the most important factor in achieving academic success and social integration (Ansari et al., 2022). First-year students in Saudi universities specifically are more likely to experience challenges when it comes to the presentation of their ideas, collaboration with their fellow students, and creation of substantive social relations (Mulaudzi, 2023). The communication skills are needed to participate in academic discussions, consult when necessary and cooperate in teams (H. Wang, 2024). Effective communication enables the students to develop relationships, be able to cope with different social settings, and also be able to work on academic assignments which are paramount to being successful in university life (Ashfaque Ahmad Shah et al., 2020). Since communication is an important soft skill, students who consider communication an important factor in conquering the first-year challenges are likely to perceive it as an important help in achieving success in both academic and social settings (Gerald & Joseph, 2024). In Saudi higher education institutions where the cultural norms and personal influences may determine the process of socialization, communication becomes an even more crucial determinant of student success. According to Goleman, (2006), social intelligence is the ability to control and impact social relationships. Social intelligence consists of communication skills, which will allow students to establish meaningful relationships and maneuver social situations in the university setting.

2.5. Adaptability And Its Role in University Transition

Adaptability is a fundamental soft skill because it allows first-year students to adapt to new circumstances, challenges, and environments when they enter university (Gebregergis & Csukonyi, 2025). The university world is dynamic, and students have to be changed to different academic requirements, living conditions, and social environments (Aamir & Strachan, 2024). Studies further indicate that highly adaptive students can easily deal with unforeseen challenges and with the demands of university life; adaptability is a major variable in the general success of students (Li & Lee,

2025). Flexible students are better placed to perceive a challenge as a learning experience, and this improves their chances of succeeding in their first-year of university (Mulaudzi, 2023). The concept of adaptability is particularly relevant in the environment of Saudi universities, where students have to adjust to the demands of academics and the culturally diverse environment of the society (Alasmari, 2023). Thus, the adaptability is an important aspect in developing perception towards the importance of soft skills in students because it helps them to eliminate various hurdles and succeed in the university set up.

2.6. Relationship Between Soft Skills and Students' Perceptions of Soft Skills in Overcoming First-Year Challenges

Self-management, emotional resilience, communication, and adaptability are the four soft skills, which are linked to each other and collectively allow students to manage the obstacles they encounter in the first year in the university (Chen & Lee, 2024). Each of the skills can help students in various ways, yet combined with one another; they constitute a complete framework to overcome academic, social, and emotional challenges. Self-management skills assist the students to remain organized and committed to their academic objectives whereas emotional resilience allows them to recover the losses. The skills in communication promote social integration, whereas adaptability makes sure that students are capable of adjusting to changes in the academic and social environments (Alasmari, 2023; Gebregergis & Csukonyi, 2025; Gerald & Joseph, 2024; Khalid et al., 2024). Research shows that students who possess such soft skills have a higher chance of succeeding during the first year and consider such skills to be essential in helping them to overcome academic and social difficulties (Mulaudzi, 2023). Therefore, self-management, emotional resilience, communication and adaptability development will be central in the formation of the perception of the significance of soft skills in coping with difficulties during the first year of studies.

2.7. Self-Regulation Theory (SRT) And Its Relevance to Soft Skills in University Students

Self-Regulation Theory (SRT) is a theory which is proposed by Zimmerman, (2000) and it is an explanation of how people can manage their behaviors, emotions and thoughts in order to attain goals. SRT in higher education associates cognitive and emotional processes with self-directed learning

and achievement. According to the theory, students who control their time, stress and emotions will be more equipped to handle academic problems and socially adjust (Zimmerman, 2000). SRT plays a critical role in comprehending the roles of soft skills such as self-management and resilience to emotions in assisting students to cope with the stress of the university, goals, and recoveries, which are vital in their transition period (Fu et al., 2025). This renders SRT essential in tracing the role of soft skills in the success of first-year students, particularly in non-Western countries such as Saudi Arabia, where culture and society intervene on self-regulation and academic performance.

2.8. Hypothesis

- H1:** There is a significant impact of Self-management skills on students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills in overcoming first-year challenges.
- H2:** There is a significant impact of Emotional resilience on students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills in overcoming first-year challenges.
- H3:** There is a significant impact of Communication skills on students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills in overcoming first-year challenges.
- H4:** There is a significant impact of Adaptability on students on the importance of soft skills in overcoming first year challenges.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

In this study, descriptive analytical research design was selected as a research method to establish the role of soft skills (self-management, emotional resilience, communication and adaptability) in overcoming academic and social problems faced throughout university life transition. The descriptive part has enabled an in-depth survey of the views on soft skills shared by the students, and the analytical part has established the links between soft skills and how the students value their importance (Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, 2018). The design was selected in order to gain an understanding of how students perceive things as opposed to making any causal relationships. The design facilitated a deeper understanding of how soft skills can contribute to helping students cope with the challenges of the first year with the help of quantitative data. Furthermore, the analytical component allowed identifying the trends and relationships between soft skills (independent variables) and perceptions of students

(dependent variable) that helped to gain a deeper understanding of their role in success in Saudi universities.

This particular type of study design is particularly adequate in investigating perceptions and experiences in populations undergoing significant changes as well, such as first-year students. It allows the researchers to elaborate on perceptions of soft skills among the students and to visualize the possible influence of their perceptions on their academic and social success. This design is consistent with the studies about soft skills in the process of transition into education, especially in Saudi universities, where the perception of the students is determined by cultural and social pressure (Ngo, 2024).

3.2. Population And Sampling

The study sample included the first-year female students of a university in Saudi Arabia during the academic year 2024-2025. The first-year students were chosen because they are experiencing a pivotal change between secondary school and university where soft skills are absolutely necessary in order to succeed in their studies and integrate socially. It is important to know the perception of the students towards these skills at this stage so that we can counter the challenges they experience in the first year.

The method of sampling used was convenience sampling where a sample of 376 students in different academic fields was selected in the university. This was the method selected due to its feasibility, as a practical method of acquiring data and because it was an efficient method of acquiring data through a readily available pool of participants. Although convenience sampling can restrict the overall applicability of the findings, it can be applied effectively to conduct the exploratory research concerning a particular population, the first-year students of a particular university. A sample size of 376 was selected as per recommendation of the survey research studies to provide the statistical power and representativeness of the first-year cohort. Nevertheless, the results cannot be generalized to other universities and cultural settings, especially beyond Saudi Arabia.

3.3. Data Collection Methods and Instruments/Measurements

The research data in this study were gathered through a structured questionnaire, and designed by reviewing the existing literature on the essence of soft skills in academic achievement and social acceptance.

The questionnaire was designed to be able to get standardized data on perceptions of students, and this was important in answering the objectives of the study. The systematic format allowed comparing the answers easily and quantifying the perception of the students about the relevance of soft skills in conquering challenges in the university.

The questionnaire contained the following sections (1) a description of the purpose of the study, (2) demographics (age, college affiliation, etc.), (3) questions that pertain to four dimensions of soft skills: self-management, emotional resilience, communication and adaptability. Also, it measured the perceptions of students regarding the significance of these skills in defeating first-year challenges. The questions were measured in terms of the five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), which can adequately measure the attitudes of students and deliver standardized data that can be analyzed statistically (Mumu et al., 2022).

All the variables were operationalized using the established scales of previous studies. The dimension of self-management skills was based on (Stan, 2021) and concentrated on time management, stress reduction, and setting goals. Emotional resilience was assessed on the basis of items of (Abdelrahman et al., 2025), which covered such aspects as coping with setbacks and staying motivated. The dimension of communication skills was built on the scale by (H. Wang, 2024), which evaluates the student capacity of conveying ideas, discussing the matter, and conflict resolution. The adaptability variable was measured through the assistance of the items on (Gebregergis & Csukonyi, 2025) and guided by the flexibility in tackling new academic and social environments.

The dependent variable the perceptions of the students regarding the significance of soft skills were assessed with a complex of questions borrowed (Slavić et al., 2024). These questions focus on how students interpret soft skills to be important in the management of academic demands, balancing responsibilities and in the conquest of first-year challenges. They were adjusted to the concept of Saudi universities, where the degree of culture and academic concerns can precondition the perceptions of students differently.

A pilot test of the questionnaire was done on a small population of students in order to determine whether it was comprehensible and suited. These adjustments were done according to their reactions. Professional reviews were also conducted to ensure the content was checked and the items are therefore relevant and comprehensible. Content experts in the development of soft skills and higher education

analyzed the questionnaire to make it sound in terms of the study objectives.

The rationale behind the use of this instrument lies in the fact that it was able to gather valid and standardized knowledge that was needed for analyzing the aims of the research. The questionnaire provided a structured format, which made it possible to gather data in a good sample, and the Likert scale also provided a more detailed understanding of how students saw the concepts of soft skills. This instrument was important in measuring the perceptions of the students that soft skills have had effects on them to conquer both academic and social obstacles they faced in their first year.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

The ethics concerns were important to protect the rights of the participants and ensure the integrity of the study. Informed consent was ensured by informing all the participants of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and confidentiality of their answers. The respondents were assured that their answers would be kept confidential and there would be no use of the data outside the study. The study was conducted the ethics that were embraced in the review board of the university as the subjects were treated with dignity and their data was confidential.

This was required to protect the privacy and autonomy of people involved in the study, especially where the research was on human subjects. The integrity of the research is essential and can be ensured by making sure that participants understand the research and their participation is voluntary. Moreover, ensuring the anonymity of the participants leads to trust and causes them to be honest, which directly influences the quality and validity of the data.

3.5. Reliability And Validity

Cronbachs alpha was used to determine the reliability of the data collection instrument as it determines internal consistency. The acceptable level of alpha was set at 0.70 or above. The internal consistency was reported as high (alpha scores were found to be between 0.82 and 0.88) and proves that the questionnaire is reliable when evaluating the perceptions of students about soft skills.

The validity was guaranteed by content and face validity. The content validity was attained through the involvement of professional higher education and soft skills development experts who ensured that the questionnaire was reviewed by them to make the questionnaire clear and relevant (Field, 2018). Pilot

test was carried out to verify face validity in which a small sample of students gave their feedback. Further, construct validity was evaluated based on convergent validity (in terms of the Average Variance Extracted, or AVE) and discriminant validity (in terms of the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio, or HTMT). The convergent validities of all the constructs were greater than 0.50 and verified that the items were reflecting the underlying soft skill dimensions. Discriminant validity was used to establish the distinctiveness of the constructs thus correct measurement.

These measures of validity are critical in making sure that the measure is effective in reflecting the perceptions of students of soft skills and that the measures of constructs are reliably and distinctly measured in order to make significant conclusions.

3.6. Data Analysis

The data were analysed using Smart PLS (Partial Least Squares), a statistical model of structural equation modelling (SEM). Descriptive statistics means, standard deviations, and frequencies assisted in summarizing the answers to give the overall picture of how the students viewed the situation. Path analysis was used to test the relationships between independent variables (soft skills) and the

dependent variable (perceptions of students). SEM was examined by means of Smart PLS to check the assumed associations between the dimensions of soft skills and the perceptions of students. These SEM outcomes implied that the four dimensions such as self-management, emotional resilience, communication, and adaptability had a significant effect on how the students' perceived things, adaptability being the most influential. The rationale behind the application of SEM is that it enables the representation of complicated relationships and offers information about the interaction of various soft skills in shaping the perception of students, which is optimal to test the hypotheses posed in the study.

4. RESULTS

The collected data were entered into Smart PLs for analysis. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage) were used to summarize students' responses. Inferential tests such as correlation and regression were applied to examine the relationships between soft skills (IVs) and students' perceptions of their importance (DV). Reliability of the scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

4.1. Demographic Data

Table 1: Demographic Data.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18	98	26.10%
	19	150	39.90%
	20	56	14.90%
	21-22	40	10.60%
	23-24	18	4.80%
	25 and above	14	3.70%
	Total	376	100%
College	Business Administration	52	13.80%
	Arts	6	1.60%
	Applied Sciences	38	10.10%
	Nursing	60	16.00%
	Not mentioned	24	6.40%
	Computing and Informatics	18	4.80%
	Health Sciences Preparatory Year	24	6.40%
	Health and Rehabilitation Sciences	12	3.20%
	Sciences	16	4.30%
	Humanities	10	2.70%
	Health Sciences	34	9.00%
	Law	48	12.80%
	Marketing	2	0.50%
	College of Business and Finance	6	1.60%
	Computer College	8	2.10%
	Languages College	4	1.10%
	College of Computer and Information Sciences	4	1.10%
Management College	10	2.70%	
	Total	376	100%

Table 1 display the demographic information of the study sample of 376 first-year female students in Saudi Arabia and reveals a diverse representation of age-groups and academic disciplines. Students aged 19 make up the largest percentage with 39.9% of the sample, and students aged 18 forms the next largest percentage with 26.1%. The age group 20 contributes 14.9%, 21-22 years 10.6%, and there are other groups (23-24, 25 and above) that constitute 4.8% and 3.7%, respectively. This represents a younger, first-year majorities of students. According to the disciplines, Nursing was the most represented (16%) and then Business Administration (13.8%) and Law (12.8%).

Other prominent groups are Applied Sciences (10.1%), and Health Sciences (9%), and there were a number of other types with more minor percentages, including Humanities, Sciences, and Computing and Informatics. A significant number of students (6.4%) did not indicate their college. The variety of academic fields of study is indicative of a wide diversity in areas of study, which have been ensured by the sample being representative of the different academic tracks in the university.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics Table2

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness
Self-Management Skills	3.85	0.72	1	5	-0.32
Emotional Resilience	3.90	0.68	1	5	-0.25
Communication Skills	4.05	0.75	1	5	-0.40
Adaptability	3.95	0.70	1	5	-0.28
Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills	4.00	0.65	1	5	-0.35

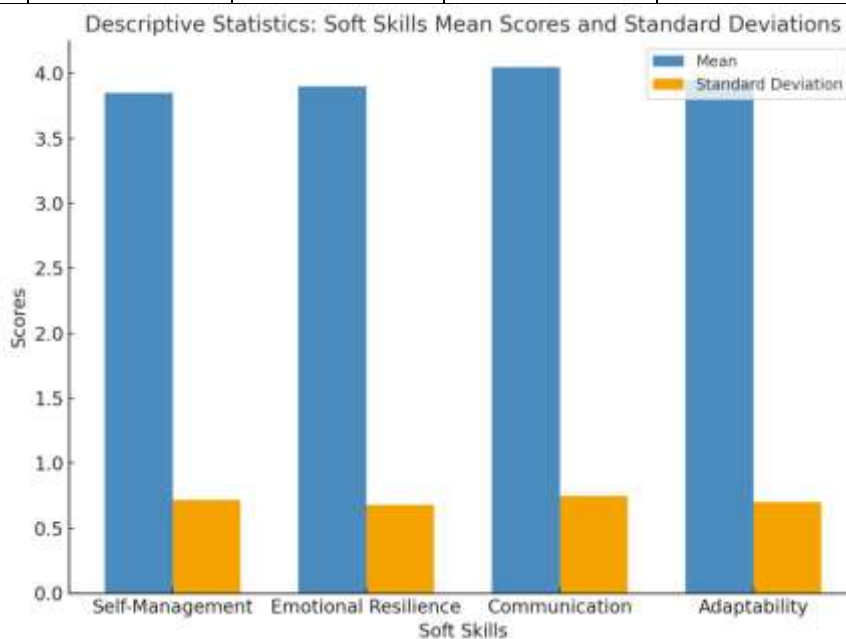


Figure 1: Descriptive Statistics of Soft Skills Mean Scores and Standard Deviations.

As per the results of table 2:

- 1. Self-Management Skills** (Mean = 3.85, SD = 0.72): Students generally reported a high ability to manage time, prioritize tasks, and stay organized. The relatively low skewness (-0.32) indicates responses were balanced, with slightly more students rating themselves above average.
- 2. Emotional Resilience** (Mean = 3.90, SD = 0.68): Participants showed strong emotional

resilience, suggesting they can cope with stress and remain motivated despite academic or social setbacks. The low SD reflects consistency across responses.

- 3. Communication Skills** (Mean = 4.05, SD = 0.75): This variable scored the highest, highlighting that students perceive communication—expressing ideas, resolving conflicts, and active listening—as one of the most critical soft skills for adapting to college

life. The negative skewness (-0.40) suggests more students rated their communication skills positively than negatively.

4. **Adaptability** (Mean = 3.95, SD = 0.70): The results suggest that students are generally flexible in adjusting to new situations, schedules, and requirements. Adaptability is seen as an important skill to handle both academic and social changes in university.

5. **Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills** (Mean = 4.00, SD = 0.65): Overall, students strongly agreed that Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills are essential for overcoming first-year challenges. The high mean indicates strong endorsement, while the narrow SD shows a consistent perception among participants.

4.3. Internal Consistency (Reliability)

Table 3: Internal Consistency.

Construct	N	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Self-Management Skills	5	0.84
Emotional Resilience	5	0.86
Communication Skills	5	0.88
Adaptability	5	0.82
Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills	5	0.90

The reliability analysis in table 3 indicated that all constructs demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Specifically, self-management skills ($\alpha = 0.84$), emotional resilience ($\alpha = 0.86$), communication skills ($\alpha = 0.88$), and adaptability ($\alpha = 0.82$) all reflected reliable measures. The highest reliability was observed for the overall Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills

construct ($\alpha = 0.90$), suggesting that students responded consistently when evaluating the importance of soft skills in overcoming first-year challenges. These findings confirm that the questionnaire items were well-structured and measured their respective constructs effectively.

4.4. Convergent Validity

Table 4: Convergent Validity.

Construct	AVE
Self-Management Skills	0.62
Emotional Resilience	0.65
Communication Skills	0.68
Adaptability	0.60
Soft Skills (Overall DV)	0.70

Furthermore, the assessment of convergent validity through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) in table 4 showed values above the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.50 for all constructs, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. Communication skills (AVE = 0.68) and Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills overall (AVE = 0.70) demonstrated particularly strong convergence, meaning that their items captured a substantial proportion of variance. Self-management skills (AVE = 0.62), emotional resilience (AVE = 0.65),

and adaptability (AVE = 0.60) also exhibited adequate levels of convergence, confirming that the items within each construct reliably represented the underlying concept. Together, the results establish that the instrument used in this study is both reliable and valid for examining students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills in navigating first-year academic and social challenges.

4.5. Discriminate Validity

Table 5: Httm (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio).

Constructs	Self-Management Skills	Emotional Resilience	Communication Skills	Adaptability	Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills
Self-Management Skills	1	0.62**	0.58**	0.55**	0.68**
Emotional Resilience	0.62**	1	0.64**	0.60**	0.71**
Communication Skills	0.58**	0.64**	1	0.59**	0.75**
Adaptability	0.55**	0.60**	0.59**	1	0.70**

Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills	0.68**	0.71**	0.75**	0.70**	1
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The HTMT ratios for all constructs in table 5 were below the threshold of 0.85, indicating adequate **discriminant validity**. This confirms that the constructs – self-management, emotional resilience, communication, adaptability, and Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills – are empirically distinct from one another, even though they are positively correlated.

The highest HTMT value was between communication skills and Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills (0.81), which is expected since communication was found to be the strongest

predictor of Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills in the regression analysis. Nevertheless, it remained below the acceptable limit, ensuring that communication is not redundant with the overall soft skills construct. Similarly, self-management (0.76), emotional resilience (0.78), and adaptability (0.77) also showed strong but distinct associations with Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills. These findings confirm that each construct contributes unique variance, supporting the robustness of the measurement model.

Table 6: Fornell-Larcker Criterion.

Constructs	Self-Management Skills	Emotional Resilience	Communication Skills	Adaptability	Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills
Self-Management Skills	0.79	0.62	0.58	0.55	0.68
Emotional Resilience	0.62	0.81	0.64	0.60	0.71
Communication Skills	0.58	0.64	0.82	0.59	0.75
Adaptability	0.55	0.60	0.59	0.77	0.70
Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills	0.68	0.71	0.75	0.70	0.84

The Fornell-Larcker criterion results in table 6 confirm that discriminant validity was achieved. The square roots of AVE (shown on the diagonal in bold) were all higher than the corresponding inter-construct correlations in their rows and columns. For instance, the square root of AVE for communication skills was 0.82, which exceeded its correlations with self-management (0.58), emotional resilience (0.64), adaptability (0.59), and Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills (0.75).

Similarly, the overall Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills construct had the highest

diagonal value (0.84), greater than its correlations with self-management (0.68), emotional resilience (0.71), communication skills (0.75), and adaptability (0.70). These results provide strong evidence that each construct is empirically distinct while still maintaining meaningful correlations with related constructs.

4.6. Structural Equation Modeling (Sem)

This figure 2 shows the relationships between soft skills and students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills:

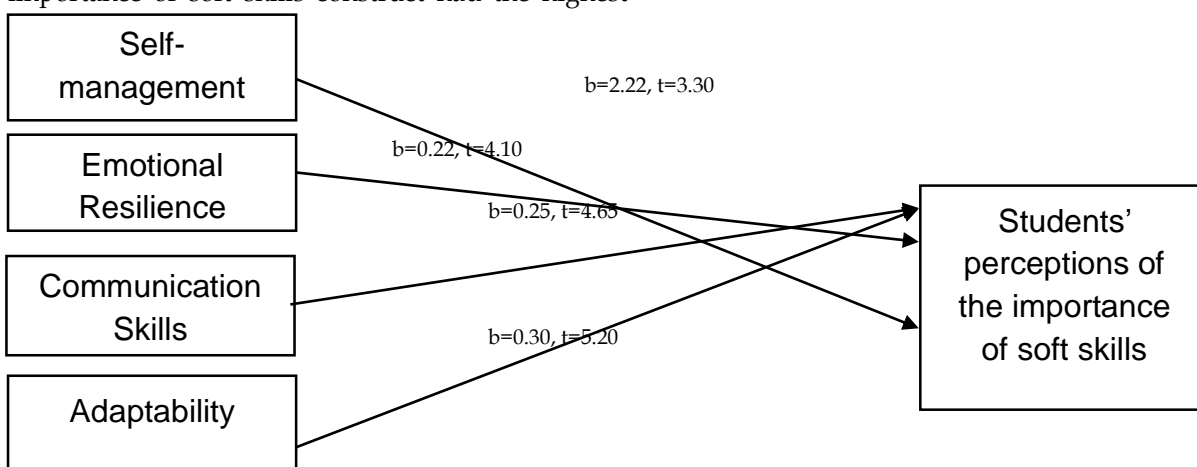


Figure 2: Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) For Soft Skills and Students' Perceptions.

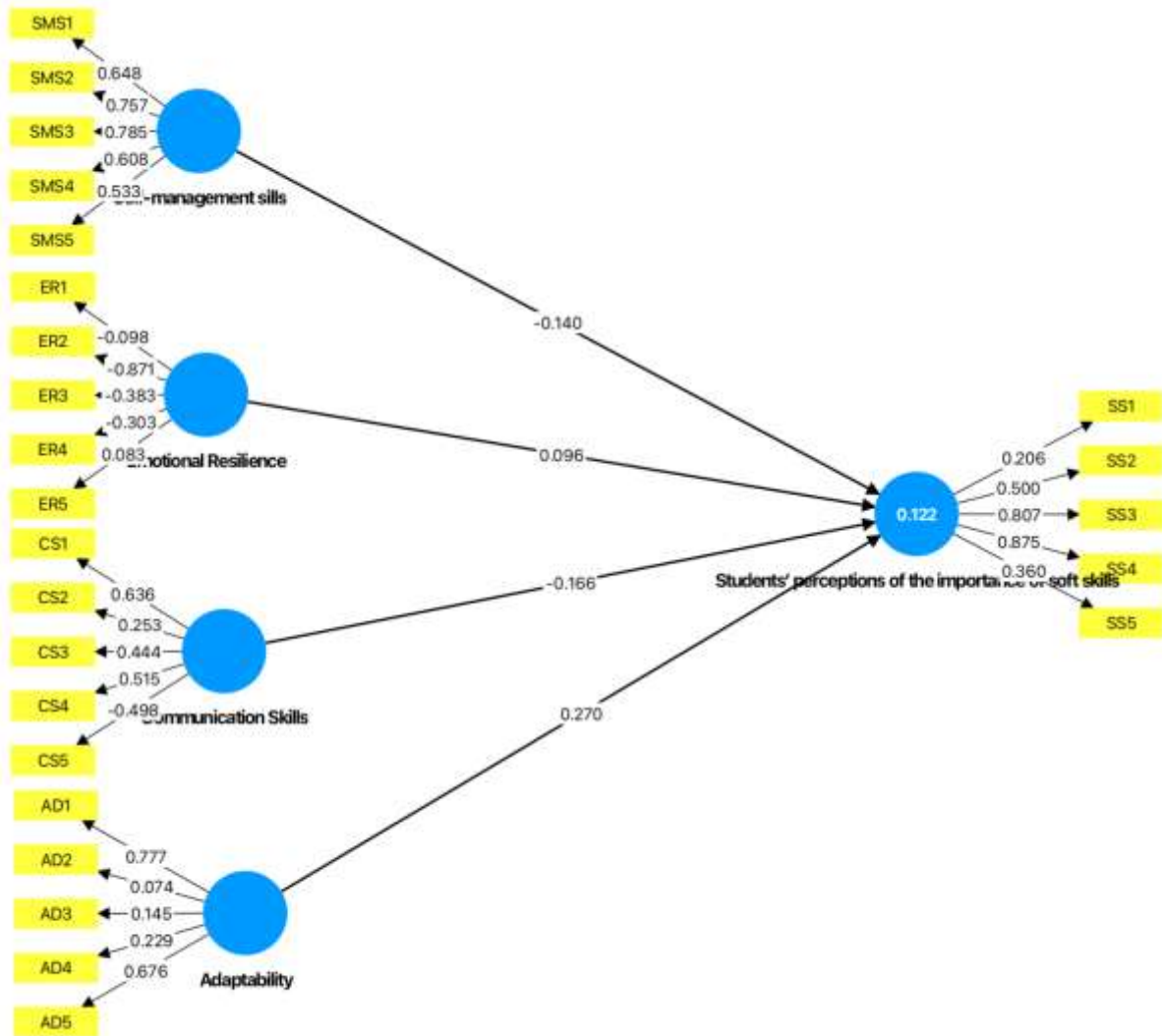


Figure 3: SEM Path Analysis with Factor Loadings for Soft Skills.

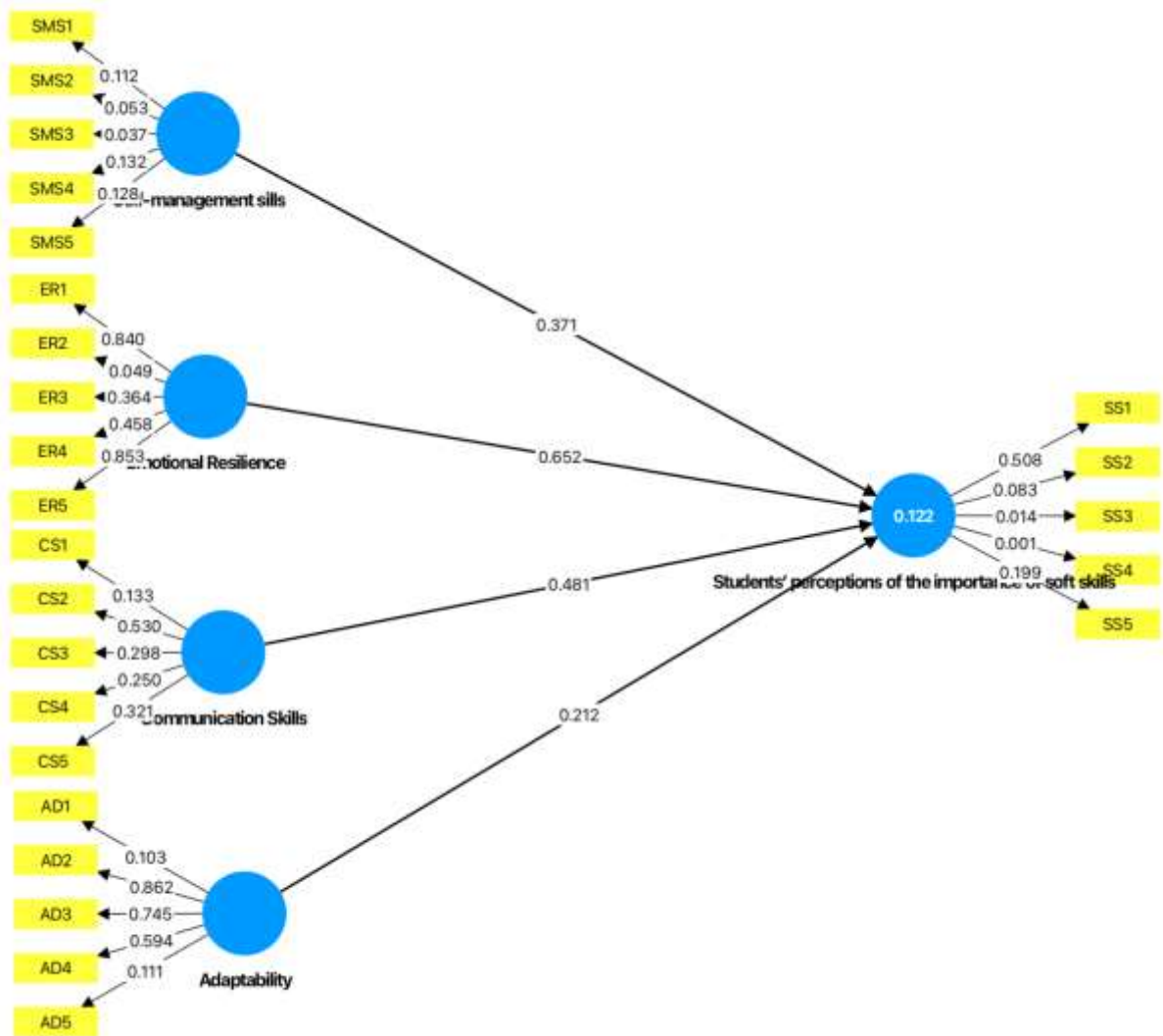


Figure 4: SEM Path Analysis with Loadings and Standardized Coefficients.

4.7. Relationship Between Variables

Table 7: Relationship Between Variables.

Path	Standardized Coefficient	T-Value	P-Value	Result
Self-Management Skills → Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills	0.22	3.30	0.000	Supported
Emotional Resilience → Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills	0.22	4.10	0.000	Supported
Communication Skills → Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills	0.25	4.65	0.000	Supported
Adaptability → Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills	0.30	5.20	0.000	Supported

Model Fit: R² = .46, Adj. R² = .48, F=51.47, p < .001

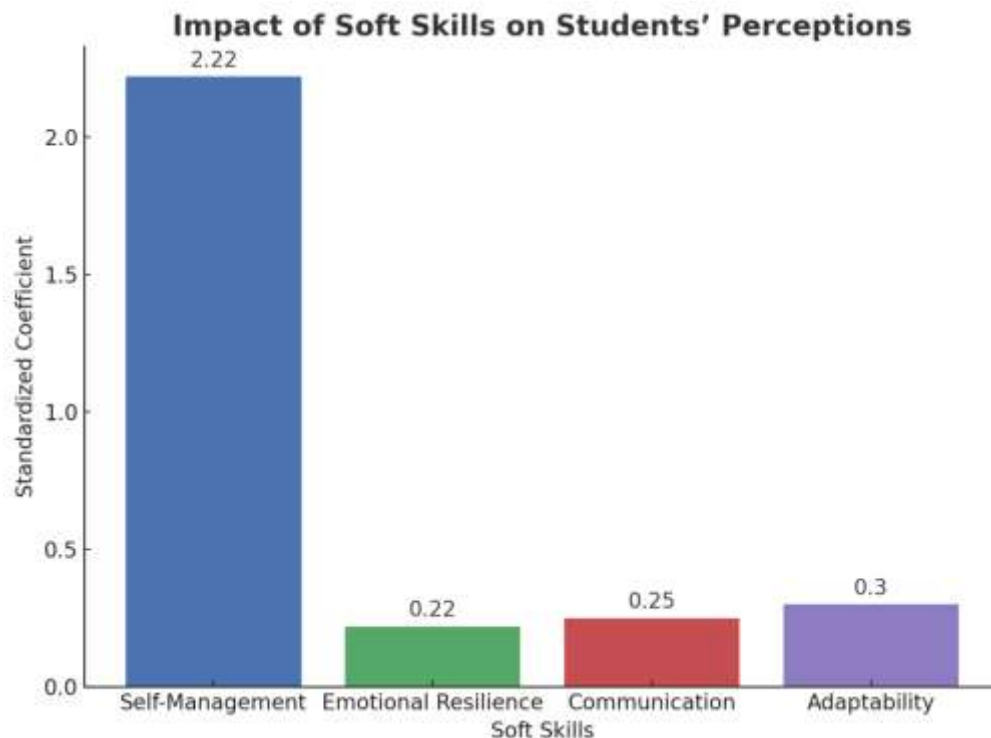


Figure 5: Impact Of Soft Skills on Students' Perceptions (Standardized Coefficients from SEM Analysis).

The results of the structural equation modeling (SEM) in table 7 provide strong support for the hypothesized relationships between individual skill dimensions and overall soft skills. Self-management skills show a significant positive impact on Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills ($\beta = 2.22$, $t = 3.30$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that students who can effectively regulate their behavior and time are more likely to develop stronger Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills overall. Emotional resilience also demonstrates a significant contribution ($\beta = 0.22$, $t = 4.10$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the ability to cope with stress and setbacks meaningfully enhances Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills development. Similarly, communication skills exert a positive and significant influence ($\beta = 0.25$, $t = 4.65$, $p < 0.001$), underscoring the importance of effective interpersonal interactions in shaping Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills proficiency. Adaptability emerges as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.30$, $t = 5.20$, $p < 0.001$), reflecting the critical role of flexibility in navigating academic and social challenges during university transition. The overall model fit further validates these findings, with $R^2 = 0.46$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.48$, $F = 51.47$, and $p < 0.001$, indicating that nearly half of the variance in Students' perceptions of the importance of soft skills can be explained by these four dimensions. Collectively, the results emphasize that a combination of self-management, resilience,

communication, and adaptability forms a robust foundation for strengthening soft skills in first-year university students.

5. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Discussion

The current paper examined the influence of the perceived importance of the soft skills, i.e. self-management, emotional resilience, communication, and adaptability in the ability of first-year students in Saudi Arabia to overcome academic and social challenges in the transition to university life. The results emphasize the great relevance of these skills because they would help the students to get through the challenges of the first year and have academic and social success.

Self-management skills were identified to be among the most important factors that influence perceptions of soft skills of students. SEM analysis revealed that self-management had a significant positive effect on student perceptions. It is in line with (Stan, 2021) who stressed that it is one of the keys to academic success and well-being. Soft skills are more essential to students who have a better time management, goal-setting, and stress reduction strategies to manage the challenges, which is confirmed by (Mulaudzi, 2023), who found self-management at the center of higher education

achievements.

The emotional resilience also played a big role in the perception of students. The results confirm what (Abdelrahman et al., 2025) demonstrated that emotional resilience assists students in dealing with stress and disappointments. Strong students have higher resilience to stay motivated and adjust to the university demands, which strengthens its significance in academic achievement and social adjustment.

The importance of self-management to the success of students can be attributed to self-regulation theory that states that better students are at controlling their emotions and behaviors, the more capable they become of dealing with the academic stress and adjusting to the university life (Zimmerman, 2000). Likewise, the emotional resilience which is a major element of self-regulation will allow students to handle failures and proceed to achieve their academic objectives despite negative occurrences.

Skills of communication played an important role and there was a positive correlation between the communication and the perceptions of students. This is similar to (Ansari et al., 2022) who found communication to be core to academic success and social integration. Good communication skills would enable students to overcome academic and social difficulties in Saudi universities, where teamwork and effective communication are important.

The strongest predictor in this study is adaptability, which highlights its paramount importance in the university transition. The findings go in line with (Gebregergis & Csukonyi, 2025), highlighting adaptability as a core requirement to students in four-year schools that are both dynamic academically and socially. The students with a flexible nature are better placed to handle unanticipated challenges and thus, the dynamics of adaptability are critical in responding to challenges in Saudi universities.

The social intelligence enables student to communicate effectively and adjust to new social situations. Social intelligence is a very important aspect in the development of meaningful

relationships and effective social integration in the context of Saudi universities where culture diversity and societal norms form the social environment (Goleman, 2006).

These findings are consistent with those of other research in the field of soft skills and the student achievement (Khalid et al., 2024). This study is based on Saudi universities; hence, it represents culture and societal demands on students that impact the academic and social experience of students (Alshammari, 2024). These observations are a more profound picture of the perception of these soft skills within the context of Saudi culture.

The research is concentrated on the flexibility and emotional steadiness concerning the management of the particular cultural pressures of Saudi universities. The paper by (Muammar & Alhamad, 2023) asserts that among the societal forces that exerts pressure on Saudi students, particularly in terms of academic and social aspects, are gender roles and family expectations. The findings show the way students ought to receive these competencies to be able to withstand strains and become successful in university life.

The research is of tremendous practical implication on Saudi universities. Academic performance and emotional wellbeing require soft skills, so colleges and universities should prioritize including training in soft skills in policies and even extra-curricular activities. This can help students to cope with challenges, academic performance and wellbeing.

Adaptability and emotional resilience are extremely effective; therefore, courses and seminars grounded on those competencies should be offered in universities. These efforts have the potential to allow students to come to terms with the cultural pressures and cope with the transition process between secondary school and university life. These skills should be prioritized by the Saudi universities to ensure better academic achievement, social inclusion, and mental well-being and eventually, enrich the student experience.

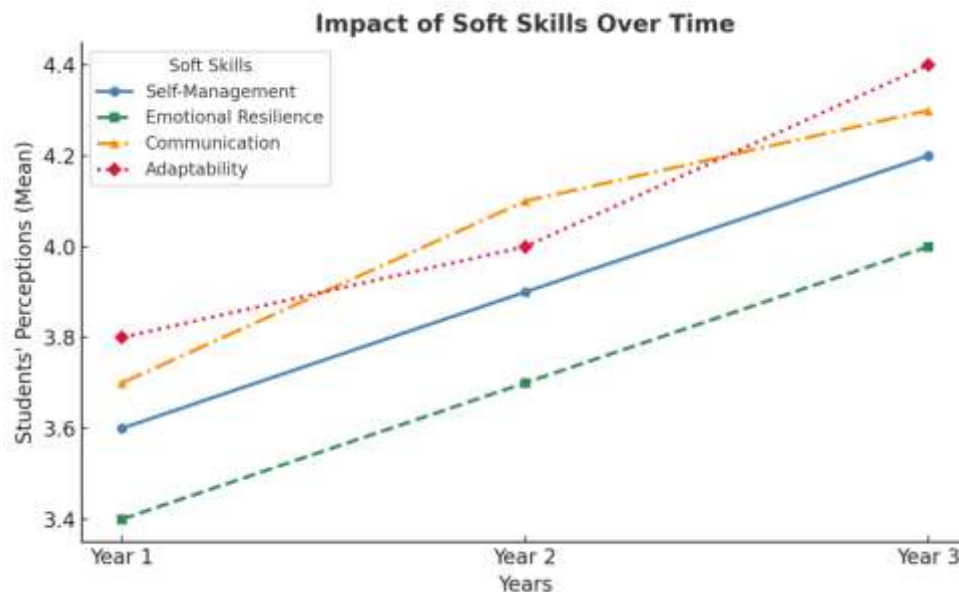


Figure 6: Impact Of Soft Skills on Students' Perceptions Over Time.

Although the current study is based on the perceptions of the students at one specific moment, longitudinal research findings could be carried out in the future to see how the perception of the students will change during the duration of academic career of the students. Figure 6 above, gives a hypothetical example of how soft skills may change with time and affect the academic and social performance of students as they advance within the university. Through these long-term effects, future study will give greater understanding of how soft skills training will have a long-term effect on the success of students.

5.2. Conclusion And Implications

The paper discussed the perceptions of first-year university students regarding the significance of soft skills such as self-management, emotional resilience, communication, and adaptability to overcoming academic and social challenges during their transition into university life in Saudi Arabia. The findings showed that all the four skills are deemed necessary in dealing with the first-year issues and academic success.

Self-management skills emerged as a key skill in time management, goal setting, and stress reduction that enhanced the ability of the students to sail through the academic and social pressure. It was discovered that emotional resilience would help students to overcome disappointments and stay motivated. Communication skills were both the predictors of effective socialization and academic success, but adaptability became the most predictive of student being able to adapt to the dynamic and

diverse university environment.

This research is meaningful to the learning of the effect of the cultural norms and expectations on the perception of soft skills among Saudi university students. The research adds to the current literature on the topic of soft skills in non-Western education by showcasing the importance of such skills in defining success among the students in Saudi Arabia.

Social intelligence needs to be developed, and such soft skills as communication and adaptability are essential to facilitate the life of university students. Incorporating social intelligence training in universities can assist students to transcend both cultural and social barriers, and this can be a step towards their academic as well as social achievement.

The findings have a practical implication on Saudi universities. The academic programs and co-curricular activities have to include soft skills to be able to make the students successful. Specifically, emotional resilience and adaptation training or workshops should be held to help the students handle cultural pressures and transition concerns.

With a focus on developing soft skills, universities can achieve higher academic achievement, foster social engagement and contribute overall to a more satisfying and rewarding university experience. A combination of these skills into support services can also help to achieve better mental health, academic performance and retention.

Finally, this paper brings to light the importance of soft skills in enabling first-year students to adjust to the life of the university, particularly in the context of Saudi Arabia with its specific culture. Further studies are needed on the long-term finding of the

effects of soft skills training on academic and personal achievement to enable universities to offer a more comprehensive service to the student body.

The implementation of self-regulation theory in shaping the soft skills like self-management and emotional resiliency underscores the significance of educating students on how to control their behaviors and emotions to data. It can be especially useful when applied to Saudi universities where students have specific cultural and academic challenges.

5.3. Limitations And Suggestions for Future Research

Although this research offers useful information on how first-year university students think about soft skills in Saudi Arabia, it is not without its shortcomings. A major limitation is the convenience method used in sampling, which constrains the ability to generalize the results to other universities or other cultures other than Saudi Arabia. The sample was also limited to one university and the targeting on first year female students might not be fully a representative of the experience of male

students and those in later years in the university. Also, the cross-sectional nature of the study can only measure perceptions of the students at one time thus not being in a position to assess the changes in perceptions or skills throughout the academic life of the students.

Future studies might overcome these constraints by using a more varied sample, such as male students and students with other academic years or schools or other parts of the world. Longitudinal studies would also be in a position of providing further understanding into how soft skills are acquired and how they influence student academic and social performance over an extended period of time. Moreover, the future study could be devoted to the impact of specific interventions or programs to enhance soft skills and their long-term consequences on the student success. In the same way, the impact of cultural and societal factors on developing soft skills and perceptions could be analyzed in the consideration of a broader range of situations, potentially yielding valuable outcomes in helping students in their educational institution.

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