

# The Integration of Soft Skills in Language Learning Classroom: The Perspective of Thai ELT Teachers at A University of Technology

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Article information	Abstract
<p><b>Article history:</b>  Received: 17 Sep 2023  Accepted: 12 Dec 2023  Available online: 30 Apr 2024</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b>  ELT teachers  Language learning classroom  Soft skills</p>	<p>Upon graduating, students are expected to have acquired soft skills to meet potential employers' expectations. Since employers today are competing for qualified graduates possessing relevant training and workplace competencies, ELT teachers should guide their learners towards obtaining both a comprehensive understanding of theoretical concepts and a range of interpersonal abilities. This study examined whether Thai teachers incorporate these soft skills in the classroom, which soft skill elements are prioritized and taught, and how the teachers implemented these elements in their EFL classrooms. Twenty ELT teachers from Rajamangala University of Technology in Thailand participated in an online survey and semi-structured interviews. Data was collected using a 4-point Likert-scale questionnaire, which revealed that the teachers reported that they integrated soft skills into the classroom, primarily in the domains of learning skills, literacy skills, and life skills. The three soft skills reported to be most utilized were communication skills, technology literacy, and collaboration and teamwork, which are all essential for improving English language proficiency. The findings suggest that ELT teachers identify and facilitate the acquisition of weaker supplementary skills, such as leadership, to equip students with the necessary skills to succeed.</p>

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, awareness has risen regarding the need for 21st century skills. Tang (2020) identified that negotiating a new contract for a business, pitching a new idea to coworkers, or networking in order to find a new job, were soft skills employed daily in the workplace. Regarding connecting with or providing value to customers, the majority of global businesses realize that it is crucial to find candidates with strong soft skills to meet business requirements (Snape, 2017). According to Pachauri and Yadav (2014), to meet the challenges of globalization, part of the era of the information economy, a nation's strength depends heavily on its people's intelligence and expertise. Consequently, the majority of educational

institutions will mandate that their students acquire these non-technical abilities before they graduate (Sharma & Sharma, 2011). Developing these soft skills would help firms win more business and will speed up the career growth of employees.

In the 21st century, the global economic trend necessitates a sufficiently modern education and workplace certifications (Boyer & Crippen, 2014). Trilling and Fadel (2009) proposed that a significant need exists in the workforce for skilled individuals who have attained mastery in operating digital technology. Furthermore, proficiency in communication skills, extensive global knowledge, collaborative abilities, and innovative talents are now essential requirements in universities and in all job sectors. According to Hadiyanto et al. (2021), the proliferation of information technology has assisted recent college graduates to readily acquire knowledge in any academic field. The more general abilities consist of aspects like comprehension of digital technology, communication and presentation, and planning and problem solving. Similarly, Novitasari et al.'s (2020) study highlighted the significance of students developing their talents throughout higher education, since it enables graduates to perform more effectively both in the professional sphere and in daily life. Tang (2020) also emphasized the importance of educators integrating chances for students to develop and apply 21st century skills into university curricula. Examples of such qualities include teamwork, communication, and lifelong learning. This suggests that in order to meet the skill requirements of the modern workforce, university education should no longer consist solely of physical lectures; instead, the emphasis is now placed on the students, who are encouraged to develop soft skills by participating in various offline and online learning activities.

Recent discussions in the Thai university context have centred on the topic of incorporating soft skills into the curriculum (Lucktong & Pandey, 2020; Tang, 2020). In Thailand, there exist two distinct categories of universities, which prioritize either research or practical skills development. Especially with Rajamangala University of Technology (RMUT), the subject of this study, the graduating of students with sufficient levels of general competence is predicated on academic and strategic planning, in addition to other aspects of goals associated with the generation of value. The aim is that students are provided with the education and training necessary to satisfy the requirements of the workforce required to serve new industrial clusters in Thailand (rmutk.ac.th, 2022). Because of this, the phrase “hands-on students” was incorporated into the university’s vision statement, and it eventually became the most distinguishing characteristic of the university. In order to substantiate the aforementioned statement, it is necessary to consider the primary objectives of RMUT, which entail the establishment of a university that focuses on science and technology. This institution offers academic programs as well as advanced professional training at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels. The primary objective of the RMUT is to enhance the number and type of educational opportunities for graduates of vocational institutes by placing a strong emphasis on the development of practical skills and knowledge. This also encompasses providing opportunities for students who are currently enrolled at community colleges (rmutk.ac.th, 2022).

Recently, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, educational institutions worldwide were obligated to adopt online and hybrid education models, utilizing diverse methods of instruction. The most essential aspect of the educational process is ensuring that it continues to function

normally in the face of emerging competition. According to Volkov et al. (2022), the construction of students' soft skills, such as interaction with people, organization of group work, and the ability to solve problems, is one of the most essential concerns in the new educational process. These abilities are also subject to significant shifts; for instance, there has been a definite shift in the modes of communication used in interpersonal settings. During the lockdowns, a person was only allowed to speak with members of their immediate family; all other communications were to be conducted through the use of digital devices. Education was impacted in various ways by each of these shifts. Related problems appear to have worsened as a result of the pandemic. According to Volkov et al's (2022) research, not only have students and teachers had to overcome technological obstacles, but also emotional and social hurdles.

As previously mentioned, in this century, both local and international businesses require employees with a higher proportion of soft skills compared to hard talents. Furthermore, the primary objectives of RMUT are to offer education and training that meet the demands of a workforce needed to support emerging industrial clusters, commonly referred to as "hands-on students" (rmutk.ac.th, 2022). Instructors are tasked with the difficult responsibility of leading students to a grasp of not only theory, but also a set of soft skills that will allow teachers to teach their students. The English educators who were the researchers in this study reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic they incorporated soft skills into their teaching approach in order to attempt to equip their students with the necessary abilities to apply soft skills in their future professional endeavors. In order to fulfill the needs of those workplaces they agreed that should be a greater emphasis on developing soft skills, particularly with recent college graduates. Thus, the research aims to identify the specific soft skills that ELT instructors have extensively integrated, as well as the strategies which they have used to incorporate soft skills education in the classroom.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Hard skills and soft skills

*Hard Skills.* According to Patacsil and Tablatin (2017), skills refer to the level of performance of an individual on a particular task, and they can be divided into technical elements (hard skills) and behavioral elements (soft skills). The same authors also mentioned that hard skills are used as the basis for the development of educational curricula, in the future profiling of jobs and the technical functions that industry desires most. According to Lamri and Lubart (2023), hard skills are teachable abilities. Students learn them in the classroom, through books or other training materials. These hard skills are often listed in cover letters and on résumés. Hard skills include proficiency in a foreign language, a relevant degree or certificate, high typing speed, ability in machine operation, and proficiency in computer programming. Soft skills, on the other hand, are personal qualities that help employees thrive in the workplace (Hendarman & Tjakraatmadja, 2012). In addition, hard skills help identify candidates who are good on paper, whereas soft skills indicate which candidates are good in person. This means that every employee needs a good mix of hard and soft skills so that they can be successful in their roles (Hendarman & Tjakraatmadja, 2012).

*Soft Skills.* Employees require soft skills in order to effectively and efficiently accomplish a variety of duties in the workplace. These skills are fundamentally necessary for personal growth, social engagement, and achieving success in the workplace. Soft talents encompass several abilities, such as effective communication, collaborative aptitude, and adaptability (Hadiyanto et al, 2022; Mailool & Ameliasari, 2020). According to Lamri and Lubart (2023), soft skills are people skills that involve interaction, collaboration, processing information, and managing people. Many research studies and textbooks describe various soft skills. In addition, Stauffer (2022) mentioned that each 21st century skill can be broken into one of three categories: learning, literacy, and life skills. Start with learning skills, more educators know about these because they are universal requirements for any career. Learning skills comprise critical thinking (finding solutions to problems), creativity (thinking outside the box), collaboration (working with others), and communication (talking to others). Next, literacy skills are increasingly concerned with different elements in digital comprehension, comprising information literacy (understanding facts, figures, statistics, and data); media literacy (understanding the method and outlets in which information is published); and technology literacy (understanding the machines that make the information age possible). The final category is life skills. These pertain to someone's personal life, but they also bleed into the professional setting. They comprise flexibility (deviating from plans as needed), leadership (motivating a team to accomplish a goal), initiative (starting projects, strategies, and plans on one's own), productivity (maintaining efficiency in an age of distractions), and social skills (meeting and networking with others for mutual benefit) (Stauffer, 2022).

## **2. The importance of soft skills in language learning classrooms**

A crucial issue that develops when higher education and the modern workplace intersect is the readiness of graduates to fulfill the increasing requirements of the competitive labor market (Mailool & Ameliasari, 2020). In the 21st century, soft skills have become a crucial part of the educational curriculum in different professions, along with information, media, and technology skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Mailool and Ameliasari (2020) conducted a study that revealed the significant impact of education in equipping community members with valuable skills that are in line with the requirements of socioeconomic conditions, as discussed in a study by Trilling and Fadel (2009). The study's findings revealed that students received instruction in soft skills through a range of instructional methods, such as lectures, mentorship, seminars, and presentations.

In the field of English language learning, research by Kalyana (2019) suggested that a set of indispensable abilities must be acquired by learners who study English as a field, so that they are then able to adapt to a wide variety of professional settings. Exemplary English instructors demonstrate a genuine concern for both the language and literary works they impart, along with paying attention to the various techniques employed in the process. In the process, an English instructor is required to present a substantial amount of factual information sourced from news outlets and the internet to demonstrate the significance of language proficiency in job interviews and professional interactions. Instructors bear the duty to acquire and disseminate knowledge pertaining to language skills, as learners are eager to obtain insights on enhancing their employability (Kalyana, 2019).

### 3. Soft skills framework

The following soft skills framework served as a guideline for the researchers to group the elements of most frequently used soft skills. The elements of soft skills are varied, and they are mentioned in different ways. Table 1 displays the most frequently referenced soft skills from a variety of studies. All of the authors stressed the importance of communication, followed by the abilities to work together, solve problems, think critically, and learn independently, in that order. In addition to the non-technical abilities suggested by the previously mentioned authors, the soft skills we identified can also be categorized according to Stauffer's (2022) categories of 21st century skills, which provides a relevant context. In addition, Stauffer's categories of 21st century skills are current, and it was used to construct the present study's questionnaire.

As shown in Table 1, the elements of soft skills investigated in this research can be divided into three main parts. Learning skills is the first main part, and they comprise critical thinking, collaboration and teamwork, and communication. Next is literacy skills, comprising only one element, namely technology literacy. The final category is life skills, including initiative and social skills.

**Table 1**  
**Soft skills, following Stauffer (2022)**

Soft skills	Subramaniam (2013)	Hadiyanto (2017)	Tan et. al (2021)	Kniaz & Chukhno (2021)	Tabieh et. al (2021)
<b>Learning Skills</b>					
Critical thinking	√		√	√	√
Creativity	√				√
Collaboration and teamwork	√	√	√		√
Communication	√	√	√	√	√
<b>Literacy Skills</b>					
Information literacy		√			
Media literacy				√	
Technology literacy		√			√
<b>Life Skills</b>					
Flexibility					√
Leadership	√				√
Initiative	√	√			√
Productivity					√
Social skills	√			√	√

#### 4. Related studies

The incorporation of soft skills into the classroom is an extremely comprehensive concept, and teachers' perspectives on soft skills are multifaceted. Therefore, the current investigators classified prior research into distinct categories.

##### *(1) The integration of soft skills is highly prioritized and widely embraced.*

Numerous studies have extensively investigated the integration of soft skills in classrooms across the globe and have documented significant positive effects on the process of teaching and learning.

Idrus, Dahan, and Abdullah (2014) conducted and reported on a study at a private university in Malaysia that specializes in Engineering and Technology studies. The objective was to present the initial results of an investigation that explored the extent to which soft skills were incorporated into the instruction of Engineering courses. The researchers analyzed the teaching methodologies employed and identified the specific soft skills emphasized by instructors. The study utilized a mixed-method research design, incorporating the administration of a questionnaire survey, group interviews and a desk review. The findings indicated that the lecturers chiefly emphasized three key skills: communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and lifelong learning ability.

In the same year, Kanokorn, Pongtorn, and Sujanya (2014) reported investigating soft skills development to enhance teachers' competencies in primary schools. The research objective was to develop the teachers' soft skills during their first two years in primary schools in Northeast Thailand. The participants were teachers with under two years of service; a questionnaire was administered in 180 schools. This research study consisted of four stages. The first phase included a contextual analysis of the needs, model, and methodology for developing the instructors' soft skills. The second phase investigated the program's external validity, and the evaluation instruments and development materials were constructed. In the third phase, the program was implemented in three municipal education schools. Finally, the initiative was implemented in 15 schools. Data were collected using an online questionnaire. The results revealed that after the program was implemented, teachers improved. They innovated and improved their soft skills, particularly their communication and presentation skills, their innovation development, and teacher leadership. Concomitantly, the students demonstrated higher levels of learning achievement and were happier with their teachers' learning management.

In a similar context, Rongraung et al. (2014) studied the soft skills in private basic education schools in Samut Prakan Province, in Thailand. The objective was to evaluate teachers' soft skills while they were working in the private basic education schools and to investigate how to develop soft skills in inexperienced teachers. The sample was selected using simple random selection, and 116 teachers were selected from 81 private schools. The results from the questionnaire results indicated that the priority for developing soft skills in new teachers was, in order, communication skills, thinking and problem-solving skills, teamwork force, life-long learning and information management, innovation development, ethics and professionalism, and leadership skills.

In a similar vein, Tang (2020) conducted a study in Thailand to examine the main soft skills utilized by teachers. Tang's (2020) objective was to investigate the acquisition of soft skills among educators and to ascertain the significance of soft skills. The methodology involved both a questionnaire and an interview. The study involved a cohort of eight instructors hailing from four academic programs at a Northeast Thai international educational institution. The findings indicated that the most crucial soft skills were, in order, communication, critical thinking and problem solving, teamwork, lifelong learning, and leadership skills.

*(2) Soft skills are not overemphasized.*

Esa et al. (2013) studied the application of soft skills in an Engineering program at Polytechnic Malaysia in order to ascertain the extent to which communication skills, lifelong learning, entrepreneurship skills, and moral and professional ethics were implemented. The study employed a survey research design to obtain data from the sample, which comprised 195 students and 106 lecturers specializing in civil engineering at Polytechnic Malaysia. A survey instrument was employed, and the findings indicated that the students demonstrated limited utilization of the aforementioned soft skills. The findings also indicated that no statistically significant disparities were observed in the utilization of soft skills by students and lecturers. In summary, this study posited that educators should employ diverse methodologies to enhance the civil engineering students' proficiency in non-technical skills.

Moreover, a study by Subramaniam (2013) sought to determine how prepared secondary school instructors were to incorporate soft skills into the teaching and learning environment. The sample consisted of Malay language instructors from secondary schools in Penang's northeast and southwest districts. This study employed a quantitative methodology to determine how well teachers understood soft skills and which soft skills were most essential for teaching and learning Malay. The survey's purpose was to determine how well Malay language students were acquiring soft skills. The results indicated that teachers possessed substantial knowledge and experience regarding soft skills. Furthermore, in teaching and learning Malay, emphasis was placed on communication. As a result, the communication skills and teamwork aspects showed a notable level of proficiency. The proficiency level in acquiring other sub-soft skills, e.g., critical thinking, creative thinking, and entrepreneurship, was moderate. Presentation skills, decision-making skills, and lifelong learning skills scored lowest.

In the same context, Basir et al. (2022) endeavored to identify the soft skills of Malaysian graduates and their employment status subsequent to graduation. A total of 100,413 first-degree successful graduates were selected from the Ministry of Higher Education's dataset, focusing on public and private higher education institutions in Malaysia. The results indicated that a significant proportion of graduates, specifically 85.5%, were gainfully employed at the time of data collection. Graduates with greater self-assurance, collaboration skills, and problem-solving abilities were more employable. Other soft skills, for example creative and critical thinking, analytical skills, general knowledge, and communication skills, contributed less to graduate employability. Even though some skills contributed less, the authors still viewed that graduates had to possess these skills.



In the same year, a study by Ragusa et al. (2020) was carried out. Ragusa et al. studied higher education and university teaching and learning processes for soft skills acquisition. This study analyzed the requirements for these competencies and their acquisition by educators in higher education institutions in order to adapt to the changing European labor market in the 2020s. The sample was non-probabilistic and consisted of 212 secondary school teachers, specifically 106 Italian and 106 Portuguese teachers, and it employed questionnaires. Despite the limited sample size, the results indicated that teachers possessed a high level of interpersonal skills. The qualities that received the highest total scores were assertiveness, networking, teamwork, and sensitivity. Both the Italian and Portuguese groups scored lowest on measures of social desirability and action orientation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **1. Participants**

The study involved a sample of 45 ELT teachers, comprising five teachers from each of the nine Rajamangala universities. Nine English for International Communication (EIC) programs span the nine Rajamangala Universities, with each program having its own individual EIC program. In order to administer an EIC programs, a minimum of five instructors is required. On investigation, it was found that these individuals possessed varying levels of teaching experience, ranging from one to over 10 years. For the study, a sample of 45 of these ELT teachers was selected, and 20 were invited to complete online questionnaires. Out of the 20, a sample of six teachers additionally agreed to participate in a semi-structured interview.

Six participants were men and 14 were women, ranging from 31 to over 50 years old. Most participants had taught in English for Career subjects, namely English for Tourism, English for Public Relations, English for Aviation, and English for Business Correspondence. All the participants had graduated with a master's or doctoral degree in ELT.

#### *Rajamangala University of Technology (RMUT) context*

RMUT is one of Thailand's university systems, elevated from institute to university status in 2005. It comprises nine universities providing undergraduate and graduate level education: RMUT Thanyaburi (RMUTT), RMUT Suvarnabhumi (RMUTSB), RMUT Bangkok (RMUTK), RMUT Rattanakosin (RMUTR), RMUT Phra Nakhon (RMUTP), RMUT Tawan-ok (RMUTTO), RMUT Lanna (RMUTL), RMUT Isan (RMUTI), and RMUT Srivijaya (RMUTSV). Their mission is to provide high-quality higher education professionalism by focusing on science and technology; creating research activities, inventions and innovations; and providing academic services and a creative education with the aim of preparing graduates for independent careers and for them to stay competitive in their professions (rmutk.ac.th, 2022).

### **2. Instruments**

Online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were employed. The total population was twenty ELT teachers from nine RMUT universities. The online questionnaires were



distributed to all the participants. The questions measured reflections on the teachers' courses and on integrated soft skills in the classroom. The researchers utilized a self-rating strategy with a four-point Likert scale according to Chyung (2017), as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Likert four-point scale range interpretation (Chyung, 2017)**

Point	Scale Range	Explanation
4	4.00-3.00	Strongly Agree
3	2.99-2.00	Agree
2	1.99-1.00	Disagree
1	1.00-0.99	Strongly Disagree

This phase was to ascertain whether or not teachers reported integrating soft skills, how they integrated them, and which elements of soft skills were provided in the language learning classrooms. This phase contained 39 items measuring 11 elements of soft skills, comprising 1) critical thinking, 2) creativity, 3) collaboration & teamwork, 4) communication, 5) information literacy, 6) media literacy, 7) technology literacy, 8) flexibility and adaptability, 9) leadership, 10) initiative, and 11) social skills.

After that, a semi-structured interview phase was conducted to ascertain the in-depth perception of teachers toward their integrating of soft skills. During interviews, individuals were typically questioned about their area of expertise, the specific details of the courses they teach, and the instructional methods they employ in the classroom.

### 3. Research procedures

First, survey questions were developed following Stauffer's framework categories. For each of the eleven elements of soft skills, three to five questions were created. These questions were then verified by two external validators in order to ensure that they accurately reflected every element of the soft skills. The survey questions were piloted and revised. After the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi on January 8, 2023 (Approval code: KMUTT-IRB-COE-2023-028), the survey was distributed online to ELT teachers at nine Rajamangala universities between February 1 and 20, 2023. After an initial evaluation of the survey data, participants who expressed an interest in participating in a follow-up interview were contacted. Individual semi-structured interviews were used to clarify additional survey information and to gain insight into how the participants taught and implemented soft skills in their classrooms. Before participating, each participant was asked to sign an informed consent form and was then interviewed individually via phone or teleconference tool (ZOOM). They were interviewed individually for 10-15 minutes between March 25 and 30, 2023.

### 4. Data analysis

The analysis was divided into two main parts. The completed questionnaires were analyzed by frequency. The data was then converted into percentages and rankings. After processing

the online questionnaires, the semi-structured interviews were conducted over telephone. The conversations were recorded, analyzed, and then translated into English. Each individual was to engage in a talk lasting approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from both questionnaires and semi-structured interviews are reported in this section. The questionnaire was used to elicit the teachers' demographic information, reflections on their courses, and their reported integration of soft skills in the classroom, as shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3**  
**Reflections on teachers' courses**

	<b>Number (N=20)</b>	<b>Percentage (100%)</b>
<b>Subjects taught in semester 1, academic year 2022</b>	English for Presentations	25
	Listening & Speaking	25
	English for PR	20
	English for the Tourism Industry	15
	English for Communication	15
<b>Method for teaching in courses mentioned above</b>	Both lecture and do activities	95
	Do activities	5
<b>In terms of doing activities, which activities were used in your course?</b>	Whole class presentations	95
	Individual works	80
	Group discussion	65
	Pair work activities	60
	Role plays	30

The instructors' reflections on their courses as derived from their survey responses are presented in Table 3. The data indicates that all participants taught English for work-related purposes, including English for Presentations, Listening, and Speaking, which were taught the most, followed by English for Public Relations, English for the Tourism Industry, and English for Communication, in that order. The majority of teachers reported they used both lectures and hands-on activities for the courses listed above, and no teachers used lecture-based learning as a sole method of instruction. In a related study conducted by Idrus, Dahan, and Abdullah (2014), the primary teaching methodologies employed by teachers were cooperative learning, followed by the teacher-centered approach. This means that all the teachers had significant roles in delivering language learning classroom activities. Furthermore, the preceding table suggests that the majority of course activities involved whole-class presentations, individual assignments, group discussions, paired activities, and role-plays, in descending order of frequency. In addition, all classroom activities, with the exception of individual work, facilitate interaction among students. The outcomes are associated with the subjects that were taught, as the majority of teachers received instruction in teaching English for work-related courses. Given that the course serves as a means of communication, it was unsurprising that teachers frequently utilized communication skill in their classroom activities, and that students reported they were able to perform a diverse range of tasks.

## 1. Soft skills were incorporated into the language learning classroom.

The findings from the questionnaires are reported in this section. The questionnaire was used to ascertain the soft skills that teachers reported most frequently incorporating into the language learning classroom, as shown in Table 4 below.

**Table 4**  
**Integrating soft skills in the classroom**

Learning Skills	Communication	1. Students have a chance to listen to their classmates' opinions.	3.95	3.82
		2. Students themselves have a chance to choose the leader.	3.80	
		3. Students have a chance to speak in front of the class.	3.70	
	Collaboration + Teamwork	1. Students can freely exchange their opinions in teams.	3.85	3.75
		2. Students themselves can choose their group's members.	3.80	
		3. Students can choose their members for presenting in front of the class.	3.60	
	Critical Thinking	1. Students have a chance to ask about any issues in their courses.	3.80	3.50
		2. Students have a chance to freely give opinions about their course.	3.65	
		3. Students have a chance to exchange their opinions in your subject.	3.55	
		4. Students have a chance to ask questions by starting with Why... or What do you think...? during their course.	3.00	
	Creativity	1. Students can freely choose their seats.	3.85	3.34
		2. Students can arrange their seats as they prefer, such as in groups or semicircles.	3.55	
		3. Students can choose their own topics.	3.35	
		4. Students can decorate their classrooms following themes, festivals, or important days.	2.60	
Literacy Skills	Technology Literacy	1. Allowing students to access and use all technological equipment, such as smartphones, IPADs, and computers for their study.	4.00	3.92
		2. Allowing students to bring technological tools, such as computers, mobile phones, tablets, to their class.	3.95	
		3. Allowing students to research additional knowledge by using technology or various online channels.	3.85	
	Information Literacy	1. Students can choose the way to search information by themselves.	3.80	3.38
		2. Students were informed about sources of information, such as a library, Wikipedia, or search engine like Google, the Longman dictionary online, and so on.	3.30	
		3. After searching for information, teachers asked students about the reliability of their information.	3.05	
	Media Literacy	1. Allowing students to learn from other media in the classroom, such as Youtube, Netflix, Google, TED talks and other online channels.	3.55	3.28
		2. Teachers have intervened in checking their own information before deciding to believe or share it.	3.20	
		3. Teachers have taught media literacy and the influence of media to students.	3.10	

Life Skills	Flexibility and Adaptability	1. Students have a chance to search for additional knowledge outside the classroom besides textbooks, and teaching materials.	3.75	3.51
		2. Students have a chance to choose the presenter by themselves.	3.75	
		3. Students have a chance to choose other members who have never worked with them together	3.30	
		4. Students have a chance to switch their roles as a leader and a follower	3.25	
	Social Skills	1. Students can respect different opinions.	3.65	3.39
		2. Students can apologize to their classmates when they make mistakes.	3.40	
		3. Students can work with new groups of friends without prejudice.	3.35	
		4. Students can appreciate classmates when they do good things.	3.35	
		5. Students can set the rules and follow the rules that they jointly create.	3.20	
	Leadership	1. Teachers have stressed the importance of delivering assignments on time and of students keeping their word.	3.55	3.27
		2. Students can decide the deadlines for submitting their assignments.	3.20	
		3. Students can swap their works with their peers to allow them to review and edit them.	3.05	
	Initiative	1. Allowing students to immediately ask for feedback in their courses.	3.85	3.21
		2. Allowing students to set the goals for their courses.	3.30	
		3. Allowing students to write down the expected learning outcomes for their courses.	2.90	
		4. Allowing students to make a checklist about what they must do or want to do in the course.	2.80	

According to Table 4, the degree of incorporation of soft skills ranged from 3.21 to 3.92, indicating a high level of integration overall (Chyung, 2017). This finding is similar to that of Subramaniam (2013), in that the study highlights that educators reported possessing extensive knowledge and expertise in the realm of soft skills. In language acquisition, the classroom plays a pivotal role in facilitating teaching and learning. Additionally, the study suggests that incorporating soft skills into the classroom has an impact on ELT instructors.

Stauffer (2022) proposed a set of categories wherein soft skills can be categorized into three primary domains, namely learning skills, literacy skills, and life skills. The initial focus of skill acquisition lies in the domain of learning skills, with communication emerging as the predominant sub-skill in this particular context (3.82). This observation aligns with the research findings of Subramaniam (2013), Tang (2020), and Kanokorn, Pongtorn, and Sujanya (2014). The results of the present study suggest that communication skills are given the highest priority when considering key skills. Nevertheless, the findings presented in this study do not tally with the research conducted by Esa et al. (2013) and Basir et al. (2022), wherein it was observed that teachers restricted implementation of soft skills, specifically in the area of communication proficiency. According to the present study, students have the opportunity to actively engage with their peers' perspectives and to assume leadership roles. Due to the inherent characteristics of the subject matter, language learning, students are compelled to engage in communication

with their peers, whether through actively listening to their classmates' perspectives or participating in selecting their leaders. For instance,

I had the opportunity to teach the Cross Cultural Communication subject... In my class, students are provided with the opportunity to select their own groups. However, certain conditions are imposed to ensure diversity within each group, such as the requirement that members must come from different majors or have a mix of majors. Well, it is often observed that English major students are frequently chosen as leaders due to their diverse academic backgrounds...

*Participant 4*

The soft skill in question, rated 3.75, is closely associated with collaboration and teamwork. In accordance with research by Ragusa et al. (2022), Subramaniam (2013), Rongraung et al. (2014), and Tang (2020), collaboration and teamwork are fundamental elements of soft skills that contribute to effective communication abilities. Furthermore, this is linked to the English for Work course's inherent characteristics and the pedagogical techniques employed by teachers, specifically whole class participation. The high score indicates that students may possess the autonomy to express their viewpoints within their teams, and that they also have the agency to select their fellow group members. For instance,

In my role as an English for Journalism instructor... students are organized into smaller groups or pairs, where they are encouraged to engage in critical thinking and brainstorming... In our educational setting, students are afforded the opportunity to independently select their group members...

*Participant 3*

Creativity was reported to be least employed in classrooms (3.34). This result aligns with the findings of Basir et al. (2022) and Kanokorn, Pongtorn, and Sujanya (2014), who noted that language teachers least utilized the creativity soft skill. The scores suggest that students are afforded limited opportunities to select their own topics and decorate their classrooms in accordance with themes, festivals, or significant occasions. The absence of a dedicated classroom for university students may preclude them from personalizing their learning environment like high-school students. If there are limited opportunities for students to choose their own topics, teachers could provide a framework for students could generate their own topics. This may involve teachers scoping the activities and allowing students to develop their own topics within a framework, or, alternatively, presenting students with a limited selection of potential topics.

Regarding literacy skills, the most frequently utilized sub skill is technology literacy, rated 3.92. The findings indicate that a majority of teachers reported permitting students to utilize a wide range of technological devices in the classroom, including smartphones and iPads. Additionally, students were granted permission to bring their own technological tools, such as laptops, for classroom use. Another noteworthy issue is the utilization of media literacy as a soft skill. Teachers apparently did not engage in verifying the accuracy of information prior to accepting or disseminating it, nor did they incorporate media literacy and its impact on students. This

analysis suggests that while teachers may in principle embrace incorporating technology into the classroom and permitting students to utilize it for learning purposes, they may not prioritize instructing students in the importance of verifying information. In addition, there appeared to be little emphasis on cultivating media literacy skills and increasing students' awareness of media's influence. On this issue, Participant 5 was the only participant to comment:

[F]or Argumentative Writing..., it is often necessary for students to take a particular position on a given topic and provide the rationale behind their choice. When considering the reasons behind their positions, it is crucial for individuals to thoroughly assess the information they rely on, ensuring its accuracy and reliability, before crafting their own argumentative essay. Additionally, they must also be mindful of the importance of paraphrasing...

*Participant 5*

The final category of soft skills that individuals may pursue as a major pertains to life skills. This category's main soft skills were flexibility and adaptability (3.51). This was evidenced by the reported opportunity afforded to students to explore supplementary knowledge beyond traditional course materials, as well as the freedom to select their own presenter. Regarding social skills (3.39), it was observed that students were capable of demonstrating respect towards divergent viewpoints and exhibiting accountability by issuing apologies to their peers if they erred. The leadership and initiative soft skills were reportedly implemented in classroom settings with a rating of 3.27 and 3.21, respectively. Based on research conducted by Esa et al. (2013), Subramaniam, (2013), Basir et al. (2022), and Tang (2020), instructors exhibited a limited application of soft skills, particularly in leadership and initiative.

The aforementioned studies consistently demonstrate that leadership and initiative were ranked as the lowest rated soft skills and had a lesser impact on the overall development of graduates. Improvement was accomplished through various methods, including implementing predetermined deadlines for assignment submission and the facilitation of peer-to-peer work exchanges to enable review and editing. Furthermore, there were constraints on their ability to articulate their intended learning outcomes for courses, and limited chances to develop a comprehensive list of tasks that they considered essential or desirable to accomplish during courses. However, Idrus, Dahan, and Abdullah's (2014) study did not establish a direct correlation with the subject at hand. This particular study highlighted that teachers prioritized three fundamental skills, namely the communication, initiative, and leadership skills. For instance,

[W]hen it comes to argumentative writing... In my approach, I do not typically permit students to determine their own learning outcomes. This is because the learning outcomes are predetermined by the course description.

*Participant 5*

The findings indicate that life skills were more effectively facilitated in classroom settings in comparison to learning skills and literacy skills, in the process highlighting the significance of soft skills in educational environments. It can be inferred that teachers prioritize the acquisition



of learning skills over life skills, as the latter does not appear to be a primary goal. Nonetheless, there exist certain life skills that are noteworthy. For instance, students have the opportunity to select team members with whom they have not previously collaborated, enabling them to work alongside new classmates without prejudice. Additionally, students can be empowered to establish their own assignment deadlines, while also being granted the ability to promptly request feedback on their coursework.

## **2. Strategies employed by ELT teachers to incorporate soft skills into the classroom**

Based on the semi-structured interviews regarding the teachers' respective subjects and teaching methods, all six reported employing similar instructional approaches in order to integrate soft skills into their classrooms. This was achieved by assigning diverse tasks to students, including both pair work and group work. This approach can result in the development of the type of soft skills that are commonly acquired in a classroom setting, like communication skills, collaboration and teamwork abilities, social skills, and creativity. However, according to the responses gathered during the interviews, two of the six teachers, seemed to display a strong focus and proficiency in areas such as information literacy, media literacy, and technological literacy, as indicated in the following excerpts:

[I]n the subject of Cross-Cultural Communication, students are given the opportunity to select a topic of personal interest pertaining to the diverse languages and cultures found in various countries. Additionally, they are required to collaborate within a group consisting of individuals from different sections. Following that, individuals are required to engage in the process of searching for, reading, and subsequently sharing information with their peers. When it comes to presenting to the class, there is a requirement to deliver the information in any form of presentation...

*Participant 4*

[W]hen it comes to English for Journalism, students are typically required to read five news articles per week and then provide a summary of each article using reputable news websites such as the BBC or CNN. In this particular scenario, students are required to collaborate in groups and collectively generate their own news content for a designated website...

*Participant 3*

Regarding course evaluation, the interviews revealed that out of the six teachers, only one addressed the final task, namely when students are required to deliver a presentation to their peers in any format. Additionally, they must obtain feedback from both their friends and teachers as this process fosters the development of essential interpersonal skills known as 'initiative skills'. The following quotes from the interviews provide more details about the teachers' reasoning:

[I]n the English Conversation class, students are required to select members from various sections and to collaborate to develop a conversation based on a given scenario, such as being in a hotel, a restaurant, or a shopping mall. After that, engage



in a collaborative discussion with the students, exchanging and exploring various ideas before they present their findings to the class. This allows them to receive valuable feedback from both their friends and the teacher...

*Participant 6*

Ultimately, all the target soft skills were incorporated into the teachers' classroom activities, as evidenced by the reported outcomes. Throughout the stage of topic selection and team building, many aptitudes, such as communication, corroboration and teamwork, flexibility and adaptability were reportedly exhibited. In addition, the act of searching, sharing, and discussing knowledge with peers showcases critical thinking, literacy, and social skills. Similarly, when students presented their work to the class in various formats, this demonstrated productivity and creativity skills. The final step involved receiving feedback from the teacher and peers, highlighting the manifestation of the soft talent of initiative. This is in line with the findings of the studies by Idrus, Dahan, and Abdullah (2014), Ragusa et al. (2022), Subramaniam (2013), and Rongraung et al. (2014). The findings indicate that the teacher placed the greatest emphasis on communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and initiative. The findings also indicate that the teaching method most commonly used is cooperative learning. Nevertheless, Esa et al. (2013) found no statistically significant differences in the utilization of soft skills between students and educators.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Conclusion**

The research revealed that the ELT teachers reported a willingness to incorporate soft skills within their instructional approaches. Despite variations in age, years of teaching experience, university affiliations, and subjects taught, the utilization of soft skills in the classroom did not differ. The soft skills that were most frequently integrated into the classroom setting were learning skills, with a particular emphasis on communication, and collaboration and teamwork. The potential reason for this could be the characteristics of the English language and the specific subjects being taught, which predominantly pertain to English for professional purposes. The observed outcome is also associated with the pedagogical approaches employed by the teachers, predominantly characterized by whole-class instruction and group-based discourse. In Thailand, classrooms tend to be large, with collaboration and teamwork being common requirements in various settings. This observation is consistent with research by Subramaniam (2013), Tang (2020), and Kanokorn, Pongtorn, and Sujanya (2014). However, our results do not directly correlate with the research conducted by Esa et al. (2013) and Basir et al. (2022), for instance because the findings of Esa et al. (2013) indicated that students demonstrated insufficient utilization of soft skills, such as communication, lifelong learning, entrepreneurship, and professional ethics.

Additionally, the primary sub-skill that the teachers reported they most effectively facilitated is technology literacy. The reasons for this can be attributed to the fact that we live in the 21st century, wherein technological equipment assumes a significant role in the educational

processes of both educators and learners. Hence, educators are now generally inclined to permit students to utilize their own technological devices, such as smartphones, for in-class educational purposes. However, the teachers appear to allocate less emphasis on media literacy regarding information verification before forming beliefs or sharing, as well as when incorporating media literacy and evaluating its impact on students. Hence, it is imperative for educators to improve incorporating these soft skills into their teaching practices. This approach would enable students to harness the benefits of technology more efficiently.

Our most unexpected finding was however the relatively limited integration of the soft skills of initiative and leadership. Interestingly, in Idrus, Dahan, and Abdullah's (2014) study, integrating initiative and leadership skills were not shown to be correlated. In Thailand, Thai culture dissuades teachers from facilitating immediate classroom student feedback. Thus, students who approach their teachers with immediate feedback or questions may be perceived as assertive or aggressive. This perception often leads to a reluctance among Thai students to engage in direct interactions with their teachers. The research conducted by Tunwattanapong & Dimmitt (2010) confirmed that Thai cultural elements have a significant impact on teaching and learning in Thailand. The hierarchical structure of Thai culture and the concept of *Kreng Jai* have an influence on students' capacity for critical thinking and their level of engagement in classroom interactions.

Additionally, in Thailand, students often exhibit a tendency to refrain from establishing goals for their courses, primarily due to the prevailing hierarchical system. In the context of educational settings, teachers hold a position of authority and importance. Students are expected to adhere to a hierarchical structure wherein teachers are given precedence and respect, with students following their guidance and demonstrating respect towards them. Teachers in Thailand become accustomed to the reverence and elevated social standing placed upon them by pupils and society. In general, they are not open to being challenged or questioned in class, and students usually choose to stay quiet when it comes to criticizing whatever a teacher says (Tunwattanapong & Dimmitt, 2010).

Although soft skills such as flexibility and adaptability are frequently utilized in the classroom as a part of life skills, their importance remains overshadowed by the emphasis placed on learning skills because the primary role of teachers is to facilitate the acquisition of learning through learning skills. Consequently, soft skills such as communication, collaboration, and teamwork were reportedly the most frequently employed. Furthermore, distinguishing life skills from learning skills exhibits less alignment with the functions of teachers. This is because life skills are categorized as either personal skills or interpersonal skills, whereas learning skills can be facilitated by teachers. Hence, it is unsurprising that certain limitations exist in integrating soft skills into classrooms.

## **2. Recommendations**

ELT teachers should emphasize fostering the development of initiative skills within their classes. For instance, one approach to fostering student engagement and ownership of their learning is to offer them the opportunity to articulate their anticipated learning outcomes for a given

course. Additionally, enabling students to create a checklist outlining the tasks they are required to perform or desire to complete throughout the course could further enhance their sense of agency and responsibility. To conclude, it is vital for ELT instructors, especially those in the English for Communication and International Communication Departments across the nine RMUT campuses and in other universities in Thailand and beyond, to promote the inclusion of soft skills in Thai university curricula. Nevertheless, the actual incorporation of these skills into the curricula is a task that should be undertaken by policymakers. This step is essential to sufficiently equip students for the challenges of the professional environment while also guaranteeing their marketability and preparedness.

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