

# Perceptions of English Undergraduates in Northern Bangladesh on the Development of Soft Skills through their Academic Experience

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## Abstract

This paper explores the perceptions of undergraduate English literature students in Northern Bangladesh concerning the improvement of their soft skills through academic experiences. The paper mainly focuses on five core fields: presentation skills, technological skills, leadership skills, job searching skills, and CV writing skills. A mixed-method research approached is used to conduct the research. The quantitative data is collected through a structured survey among 300 participants and the qualitative data is collected through open-ended interviews with 50 participants. All the respondents are from 3 private universities, 2 public universities and 2 colleges under national university in northern Bangladesh. The results reveal that though students of the private university get moderate help from the university on the development of their soft skills, public university and especially national university students do not get much assistance on their soft skills development.

**Keywords:** Soft skill, Skill development, academic experience.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this technological era where information is power, soft skills are the tools that utilizes that power. Studying at a university has lots of noble causes, however no one can deny that gaining financial stability is one of the main motivations of students for acquiring Hons. degree. English Literature is a noble discipline however only studying literary works or mastering the language is not enough in this highly competitive world. Traditionally, literature in ESL classroom in schools only focuses on interpretation of the literary text called 'The Story Grammar' where students are trained to explain how the piece works and what it says (Basiga, 2009). As a result, students lack practical world skills and after graduation when it's time to find jobs they are found underqualified. Moreover, this type of teaching where the classroom is teacher centric, students often does not feel connected to the topics and don't even acquire literature's pedagogical aspects properly. Practicing soft skills in academic events (giving presentations on literature topics, group projects, public speaking

competitions, etc.) forces students to actively engage with their studies and to learn soft skills that will enable them great opportunities in job sector. To outshine other candidates, one must have good grip on soft skills like presentation skills, technological skills, leadership skills, CV writing skills, job searching skills, etc. Even if an English Literature student aims to be a primary level teacher, he/she is required to be fluent in using technology like Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, etc. Day by day every classroom is getting modernized with video-assisted learning classes. So, when even in primary level teaching jobs soft skills are a must, going for other more competitive jobs without any technological soft skills, one can only drown, not survive. Besides technological skills one must have some good grip on leadership skill. One may give a great presentation using Microsoft PowerPoint, however if he/she does not have good leadership skill others may not listen to him/her. Which will eventually result in mismanagement. Soft skills like CV and cover letter writing, job searching are skills that everyone must have.

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The first step to get a good job is to have a good CV. Every job requires different customized cover letters according to the position. Someone who has no knowledge about these things can never survive in the real world. Moreover, who does not know how to find a job or where to find a job, what jobs are best for him/her, that person is doomed from the very beginning. Unemployment in Bangladesh is undoubtedly one of the biggest problems that is holding back the country. Every year lots of graduates complete their higher education but suffers for years for decent jobs. All because during their undergraduate period, when they should start preparing for their future jobs, they only focus on their academics and not on building soft skills. Here the fault is not on the students but the educational institutions which do not create opportunities for the students to build their soft skills.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of soft skills in higher education has become increasingly prominent as global academic and professional environments demand competencies beyond theoretical knowledge. In the context of English literature education, the development of soft skills is particularly crucial, as these abilities support students' academic engagement, interpersonal communication, adaptability, and future employability. Over the past decade, researchers from various disciplines have highlighted that higher education institutions must integrate soft skills training into their curricula to ensure that students are adequately prepared for real-world challenges. Soft skills are now recognized as essential components of holistic learning, complementing students' cognitive development and bridging the gap between academic knowledge and workplace expectations.

Soft skills generally refer to interpersonal, communication, cognitive, and self-regulatory abilities that help individuals navigate different social and professional settings. Matteson, Anderson, and Boyden (2016) explain that these skills represent a wide spectrum of competencies related to communication, collaboration, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, and adaptability—traits increasingly valued across industries. In an era where technological transformation and globalization continually reshape workplace demands, students must acquire flexible, transferable skills to navigate uncertain and rapidly changing environments. Malykhin *et al.* (2024) argue that soft skills empower individuals to respond effectively to unpredictable challenges, engage collaboratively, and manage complex social interactions, making these abilities indispensable for both personal and professional success.

Research consistently shows that university students who develop soft skills during their academic years demonstrate greater resilience, stronger motivation, and more adaptability in competitive job

markets. Several studies emphasize that soft skills complement academic knowledge and contribute to employability. For instance, Islam and Das (2024) stress that graduates need to enhance their higher-order cognitive and non-cognitive skills to increase their employment prospects, as technical knowledge alone is not sufficient. These findings align with broader observations that hard skills and soft skills function interdependently; both are required for professional excellence and long-term career growth.

However, despite the recognized importance of soft skills, higher education systems in Bangladesh often fail to offer structured and meaningful opportunities for students to develop these competencies. Rahman *et al.* (2019) point out that the Bangladeshi education system tends to prioritize academic content while neglecting essential employability-oriented training. As a result, many graduates—although academically competent—struggle to apply their learning in real-life or professional contexts. Islam, Das, and Islam (2024) similarly observe that numerous students pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate degrees are unable to translate academic knowledge into practical workplace skills, which contributes to the rising unemployment rate among Bangladeshi graduates. This disconnection between theory and practice is especially evident in English literature programs, where classroom activities are frequently dominated by teacher-centered approaches, limiting students' opportunities to engage in active, skill-based learning.

## Presentation Skills

Presentation skills are widely acknowledged as a central component of soft skill development, especially for students in humanities and social sciences. These skills involve the ability to convey ideas clearly, confidently, and persuasively using verbal communication, non-verbal cues, and visual aids. Ellis (2025) emphasizes the role of presentation skills in helping individuals communicate effectively in professional settings, particularly when demonstrating transferable abilities to potential employers. Strong presentation skills also enhance students' classroom participation, critical thinking, and confidence, preparing them for academic debates, interviews, and workplace interactions. Despite their importance, many institutions in Bangladesh provide limited opportunities for students to engage in structured presentation tasks, which results in anxiety and communication barriers among graduates.

## Technological Skills

Technological competence has become an integral part of modern education and employment. Rodrigues *et al.*, (2021) note that digital literacy is not only essential for academic effectiveness but also contributes significantly to individuals' future life satisfaction. In contemporary classrooms, technology-based tools such as Microsoft Office applications, learning management systems, and online

communication platforms are essential for research, writing, and collaboration. Cuevas *et al.*, (2011) and Maldonado *et al.*, (2016) argue that teachers must remain updated in technological pedagogy to effectively guide students, as the teaching-learning process increasingly depends on digital tools. However, a substantial number of students in Bangladesh—particularly from public and national universities—lack consistent exposure to technological training. As a result, they encounter challenges in academic tasks and remain underprepared for technologically driven workplaces.

### Leadership Skills

Leadership is another crucial soft skill that influences students' psychological development, confidence, and interpersonal effectiveness. Modern leadership is not merely associated with positional authority; rather, it involves the capacity to set goals, inspire teamwork, and contribute to shared values (Grigoropoulos & Grigoropoulos, 2020). Leadership is deeply intertwined with motivation, communication, emotional intelligence, and decision-making. Research also indicates that students with leadership experiences tend to exhibit lower anxiety, stronger engagement, and higher self-efficacy (Rau, 2018). Within organizational settings, both formal and informal leaders play key roles in guiding others through a combination of personal qualities and positional power (Hollander & Offermann, 1990; Pierro *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, exposure to group activities, student clubs, project leadership, and event management can significantly enhance students' leadership abilities. Unfortunately, opportunities for such involvement remain uneven across universities in Bangladesh, leaving many students with minimal leadership experience.

### Job Searching Skills

Job search skills represent an essential dimension of employability. They include self-regulation, strategic planning, decision-making, and adaptability during the search process. Kanfer *et al.* (2001) conceptualize job searching as a self-directed, goal-oriented process that involves navigating uncertainty and overcoming setbacks. Hooft *et al.*, (2021) further highlight that job search activities are often stressful due to financial concerns, competition, and prolonged waiting periods. These factors require students to develop resilience, self-motivation, and systematic search strategies. Without adequate institutional support—such as job fairs, counseling, or orientation programs—many graduates struggle to identify suitable employment opportunities or understand professional requirements. This gap is particularly evident among national university students, who often lack access to career-related resources.

### CV Writing Skills

Curriculum vitae (CV) writing is one of the most practical and necessary employability skills for university graduates. A strong CV reflects not only

educational qualifications but also communication ability, professionalism, organizational skill, and attention to detail. Vu and Le (2022) emphasize that CV writing is a critical part of the recruitment process and should be integrated into university training. However, their research indicates that many institutions fail to offer adequate supervision or instruction in CV preparation. Aminah (2025) similarly notes that English CVs are essential for applications to multinational or international organizations, yet students often prepare these documents independently due to insufficient institutional guidance. The lack of structured training leaves many graduates struggling to present their qualifications effectively, thereby reducing their competitiveness in job markets.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Approach

To understand how soft skills develop in the minds and lives of English literature students in Northern Bangladesh, this study follows mixed method research approach (quantitative and qualitative approach). The qualitative study is conducted to get an overall view of students of different institutions in northern Bangladesh whereas the quantitative study gives a structured platform to analyze information. It listens real voices, explores how students feel, think, and reflect on the soft skills they gain during their studies.

### Research site

The study area covers one private university, two public universities, and some national universities in northern Bangladesh. These universities are selected to show how different types of institutions view the importance of soft skill teaching.

### Research Participants

This study focuses on undergraduate English literature students of private, public, and national universities in Northern Bangladesh. For qualitative approach, in total we took 50 undergraduate student's interviews from these institutions and they shared their personal experiences and feelings about both their academic experiences and how it shapes their soft skills.

For quantitative approach, we used a structured survey and conducted it among English literature students of these institutions. 200 students have taken the survey. English literature students of second year, third year, and final year are purposefully selected for both the interview and survey.

### Data Collection Methods

This is a mixed- method research. Here, the primary data for qualitative study is gained through open ended interviews and for quantitative analysis through a structured survey. These interviews carried open ended questions that allowed students to share their thoughts freely. Secondary data is gathered by analyzing papers of other researchers conducted on similar types of issues.

### Interview and survey method

Interviews of the private university students have been conducted face to face. However, all the other interviews have been conducted online using Google Meet. The interviews were more than 30 minutes long. In the interviews, small notes were taken and the interviews are not recorded. Each interview is unique as the interviews were open ended and the interviewee controlled the direction of the interview.

The survey is totally online based. It was conducted using Google Forms. As the survey is structured, students have to select answers provided by us so the survey is totally controlled by us. Every information is stored in Google Forms.

### Data Analysis Process

For the analysis, students were separated into three categories: private university students, public universities students, and national universities students. We personally went through every response of every individual student to find out the differences between these three types of institution's view on teaching soft skills. We have also used charts for further analyzing the overall responses.

### Ethical Issues and Concerns

During interviews verbal consent was taken from all the students. Also, to make the participants feel comfortable in answering, both the questions and the approach of the interviewer were objective. Questions were asked in a way that the students could not feel insecure about re

In the survey students were asked to put their emails by themselves. Their emails are taken as consent. The survey questions are also created in a way that students do not feel pressured.

## RESULTS

### Interview Report on Soft Skill Development among University Students

The interview data were collected from 50 undergraduate students studying in different types of universities in Bangladesh—private, public, and national. The purpose of this interview was to explore students' experiences and perceptions regarding soft skill development in their academic environment. The findings reveal significant variations in presentation exposure, technological skill development, leadership opportunities, and career preparation among the three university groups.

#### Presentation Exposure and Confidence

When asked about their experiences with presentation tasks, 18 private university students reported that regular classroom presentations were an integral part of their courses. These frequent

opportunities not only enhanced their fluency and confidence in public speaking but also reduced their initial anxiety over time. Many private university students explained that at the beginning of their university life, they felt nervous about speaking before others, but with constant practice across semesters, they eventually gained confidence. One third-year private university student stated, "Presentations are part of every course, so at first I was afraid, but now it feels normal."

In contrast, 17 students from public universities had fewer opportunities to deliver presentations. Among them, 12 students mentioned that presentations occurred only once or twice a year and were usually completed in groups. This limited exposure meant that only a few students actively participated, while others remained passive. Consequently, public university students developed partial confidence, as they rarely had the chance to present individually. As one fourth-year student from a public university remarked, "We only present once a year in a group, so I never get the chance to improve alone."

The scenario was quite different for 15 national university students. 13 of them reported having almost no presentation experience during their academic studies. Their courses rarely required oral presentations, which resulted in high levels of anxiety, fear, and uncertainty about speaking in front of others. A third-year national university student confessed, "I have never presented in front of a class. I don't think I would be able to speak confidently." This finding suggests that the absence of structured presentation tasks in the national universities significantly limits students' communication skill development.

### Technological Skill Development

Another major theme that emerged from the interviews was technological competence. Almost all private university students demonstrated a strong familiarity with digital tools such as Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, Google Classroom, and email communication. Specifically, 16 out of 18 private university students noted that the use of technology was embedded in their academic routines. Assignments, quizzes, and presentations were often conducted through online platforms, forcing them to develop digital literacy naturally. As one second-year student from a private university shared, "We must submit assignments in Word and present with PowerPoint, so we learned these automatically."

However, public university students displayed limited technological skills. Among the 17 public university participants, 11 students occasionally typed assignments or used email, but there was little institutional encouragement to integrate technology into their learning. A third-year student commented, "Except for typing assignments, we don't really use technology for academic purposes."



Similarly, national university students expressed even greater challenges. Among the 15 national university students, 12 students admitted to being unfamiliar or uncomfortable with software like Excel or PowerPoint, since their universities offered neither training nor digital coursework. One fourth-year national university student frankly said, “I am afraid of Excel and PowerPoint because no one ever taught us.” These findings reveal a significant technological gap between students from different institutional backgrounds.

### **Leadership and Teamwork Opportunities**

The interviews also highlighted varying degrees of leadership and teamwork exposure. Among the 18 private university students, 14 students enjoyed an environment rich in extracurricular activities, including clubs, seminars, and event organization. These platforms provided them with valuable leadership experience and enhanced their teamwork and decision-making abilities. Many of them proudly mentioned organizing departmental events, debate competitions, and volunteer programs. As one fourth-year private university student reflected, “I have organized club events, and it improved my communication and decision-making.”

Public university students, however, had fewer leadership opportunities. Out of the 17 public university students, 9 students participated in cultural events or occasional departmental programs, but these experiences were irregular and informal. Leadership was generally confined to a few selected students, while others remained uninvolved. One public university student noted, “We only lead when there is a cultural function, otherwise there is no scope.”

The situation was most limited for national university students. Among the 15 national university students, 12 students said that their institutions lacked clubs, committees, or extracurricular platforms to practice teamwork or leadership. A second-year student remarked, “There are no clubs, no teamwork activities, nothing to develop leadership.” This absence of organized student activities prevents national university students from acquiring essential interpersonal and management skills that are crucial for their professional lives.

### **Career Guidance and Job Preparation**

Career readiness emerged as another critical area of disparity. Among the private university group, 13 out of 18 students reported receiving formal training in career-related skills such as CV writing, cover letter preparation, and interview techniques. Some universities

even included professional communication or career development courses in their curricula. A fourth-year student mentioned, “We were taught how to write CVs and cover letters in a course, which helped me a lot.”

In contrast, among the 17 public university students, 12 students admitted that career guidance was not part of their academic training. Their teachers focused primarily on theoretical knowledge, particularly literary and linguistic subjects, leaving students unprepared for real-world job applications. A third-year student explained, “Teachers focus more on literary theories than career skills. We never practiced CV writing.”

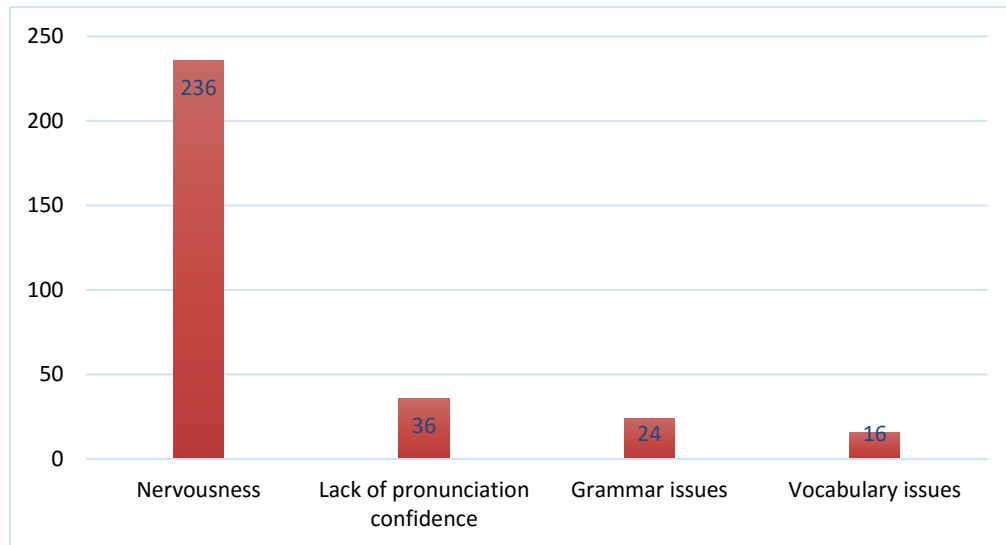
The problem was most severe in national universities, where 14 out of 15 students said no form of structured career counseling existed. Final-year students expressed confusion about how to approach the job market or where to look for employment opportunities. One student shared with concern, “I am not sure how or where to look for jobs after graduation.” These findings underline the urgent need for universities, especially public and national ones, to incorporate practical career support into their academic systems.

### **University Role in Soft Skill Development**

Across all groups, students agreed that universities should take an active role in developing soft skills alongside academic learning. Among the overall participants, 15 private university students, 13 public university students, and 14 national university students expressed that their universities need to introduce more workshops, training sessions, and skill-focused opportunities. A private university student commented, “A university degree is not enough; we need practical skills too.” Similarly, a public university student observed, “We learn Shakespeare and poetry, but we are not prepared for job interviews.” Students from national universities also voiced their frustration, saying, “Without workshops or training, graduates like us will stay behind forever.”

Overall, the interviews with 50 students reveal that while private universities provide relatively better environments for developing soft skills, public and national universities lag far behind in this regard. The findings suggest that institutional differences play a crucial role in shaping students’ confidence, technological competence, leadership capacity, and career readiness. Therefore, a more balanced and practical approach in all universities is necessary to ensure equal opportunities for soft skill development among students across the higher education sector.

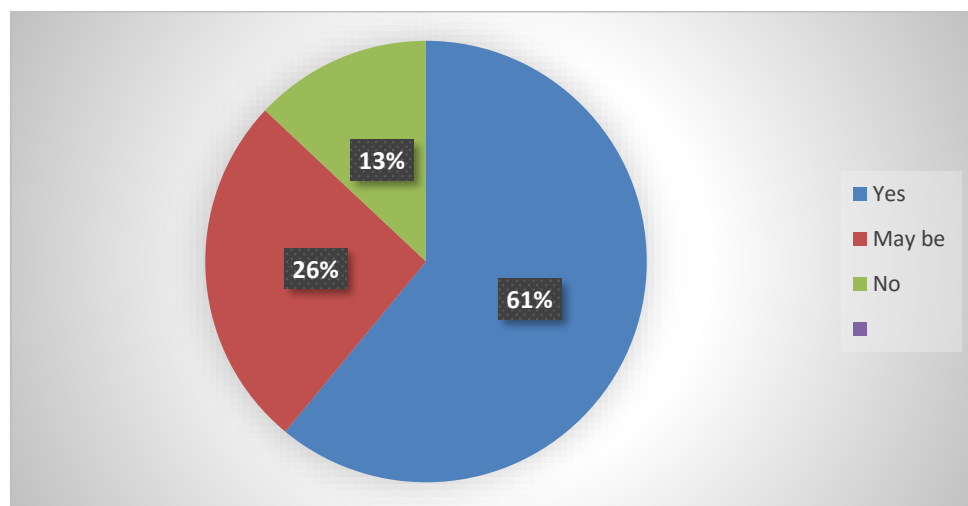
## Survey Analysis



**Figure 1: Problems students face during presentation**

The survey revealed that 74.5% of students (224 out of 300) identified nervousness as their main difficulty during presentations. This indicates that presentation anxiety is the most widespread barrier to effective communication. In contrast, comparatively fewer students noted pronunciation issues (12%, 36 students), grammar problems (8%, 24 students), and vocabulary limitations (5.5%, 16 students). These findings strongly align with interview data, where public and national university students repeatedly expressed fear and lack of confidence because they rarely present in class. On the other hand, private university students reported frequent

presentation practice, leading to lower anxiety. Overall, this figure shows that insufficient exposure to presentations significantly contributes to students' nervousness and communication challenges. One national university student stated, *"We hardly ever present, so whenever teachers suddenly ask us, I get extremely nervous."* Another public university student added, *"I forget everything when I stand in front of the class because I never practiced it properly."* This clearly shows that nervousness stems not from linguistic problems but from the lack of structured presentation opportunities.



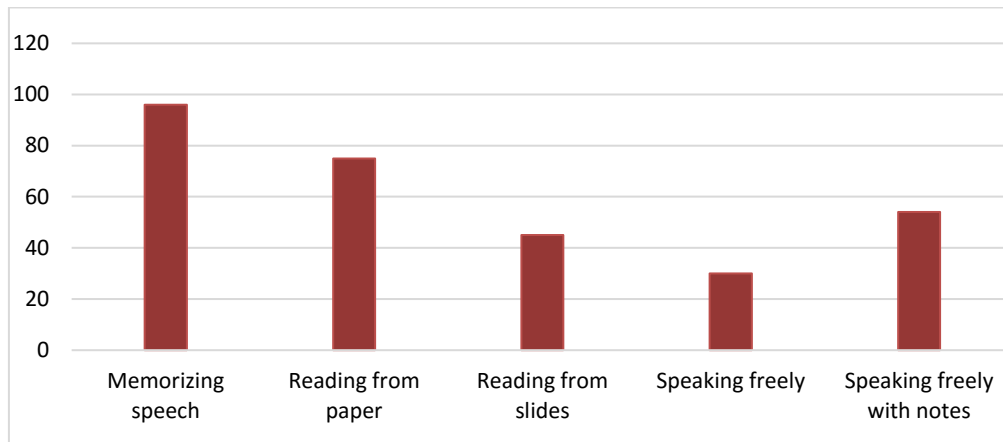
**Figure 2: Student's understanding on presentation etiquette**

A total of 61% (183 students) reported that they understand presentation etiquette, while 26% (78 students) were unsure and 13% (39 students) stated they do not know presentation etiquette at all. This demonstrates a clear knowledge gap, particularly among institutions that do not include presentations in their

curriculum. Interviews confirmed that private university students learned etiquette—such as dress code, posture, and slide design—through regular practice. Meanwhile, most national university students reported never being taught presentation standards. The survey and interview results together highlight an urgent need for universities

to offer structured guidance on professional presentation behavior. One interviewed private university student said, “Our teachers always remind us about dress code and slide structure.” In contrast, a national university

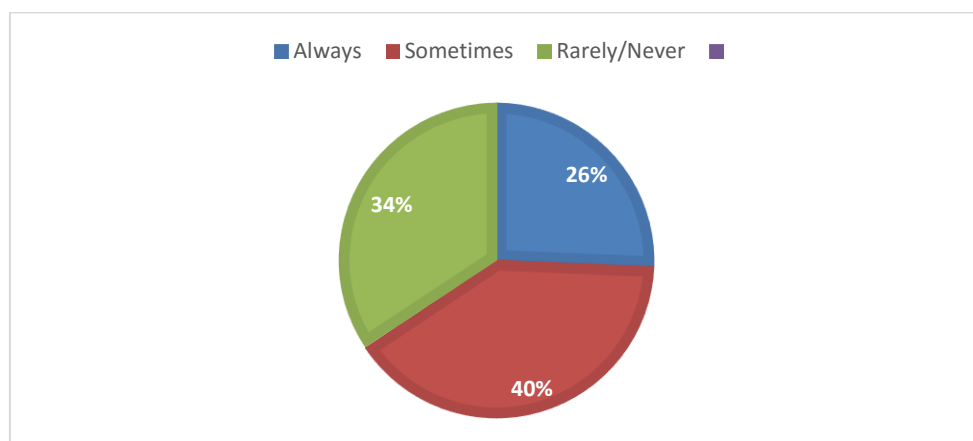
student admitted, “I don’t know what presentation etiquette means because we never practiced it in class.” Thus, the survey and interviews collectively point to an urgent need for formal training on presentation etiquette.



**Figure 3: Student’s preferred methods of presentation preparation**

The data show that significant portions of students rely on memorization (32%, 96 students) or reading from paper (25%, 75 students) during presentations. Another 15% (45 students) read from slides, while only 10% (30 students) can speak freely. An additional 18% (54 students) use short notes. These results reinforce interview findings where many students—especially those from public and national universities—said they fear forgetting their lines and therefore depend on scripted preparation. The lack of

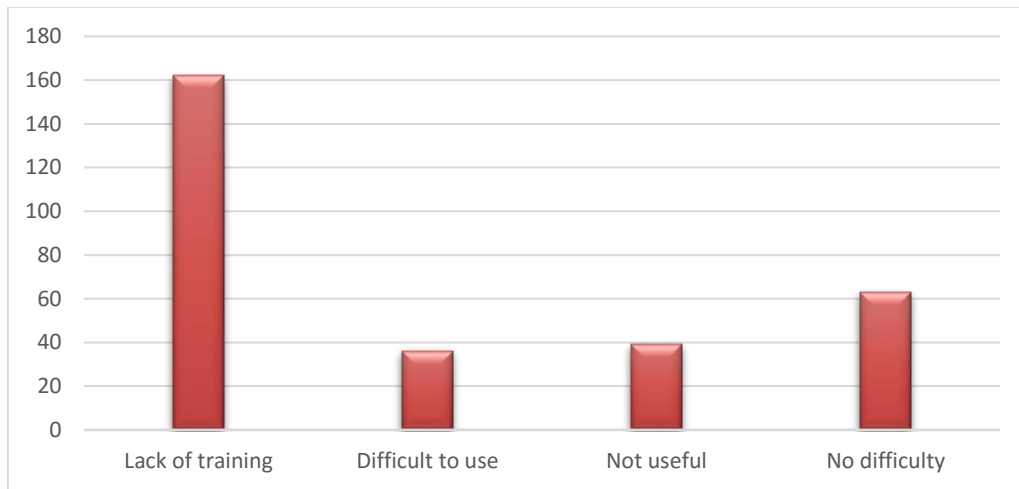
regular presentation tasks prevents them from building spontaneous speaking skills. This figure emphasizes a critical weakness in students’ oral communication development. One public university student remarked, “I memorize every line because if I try to speak normally, I become blank.” Another student admitted, “Since presentations are rare for us, we depend on written scripts.” These responses confirm that inadequate practice leads students to rely on memorization rather than expressive communication.



**Figure 4: Frequency levels of academic software use among students**

The survey indicates that 26% (77 students) consistently use academic software such as Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. Meanwhile, 40% (120 students) use these tools occasionally, and 34% (103 students) rarely or never use them. Interview data showed a strong contrast between institutions: private university students frequently used software for assignments and presentations, while public and national university students had minimal exposure. This lack of

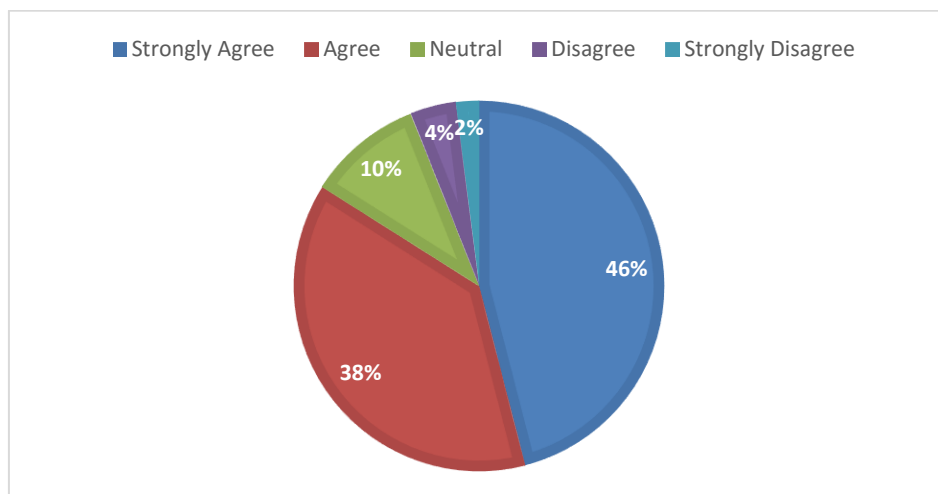
technological use places many students at a disadvantage in both academic and professional environments. One national university student noted, “We don’t have computer labs, so I never learned to use these applications.” A private university student contrasted this by saying, “Every assignment we submit must be typed and formatted, so we are used to it.” This figure demonstrates a serious technological skill gap among students from different institutional backgrounds.



**Figure 5: Challenges students face while using Microsoft applications**

Over half of the respondents (54%, 162 students) reported they do not receive proper training on Microsoft applications. Additionally, 12% (36 students) find these tools difficult to use, and 13% (39 students) do not see these applications as useful. These results match interview findings where national university students clearly stated that no teacher ever taught them these tools. The lack of institutional guidance creates major

technological barriers, which hinder students' academic performance and future job readiness. One student said, "No teacher has ever taught us how to use Word or PowerPoint." Another added, "I find Excel confusing because I never learned it properly." These responses explain why students face difficulties: they simply do not receive adequate institutional guidance.

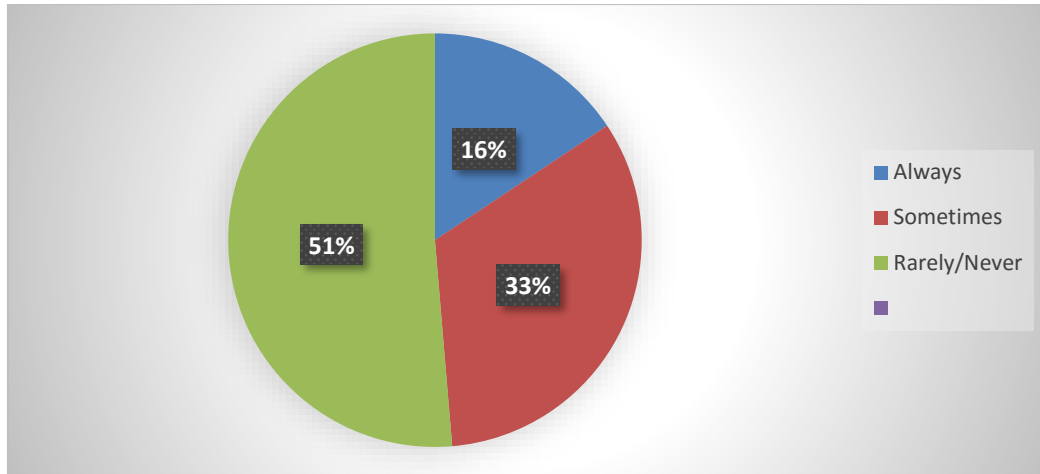


**Figure 6: Students perception on the significance of Microsoft Office skills**

A large majority- 84% (252 students) agreed that MS Office skills can improve academic performance. Only 6% (18 students) disagreed, with the remaining students staying neutral. Despite students clearly recognizing the importance of digital literacy, interviews showed that very few institutions provide training. Private universities provide some instruction, but public and national universities do not, creating a

serious mismatch between student needs and institutional offerings. One national university student shared, "I know Microsoft skills are important, but I don't have anyone to teach me." Another participant remarked, "If we had workshops on Word and PowerPoint, our assignments would improve." Thus, although students understand the value of digital literacy, limited institutional support prevents skill development.

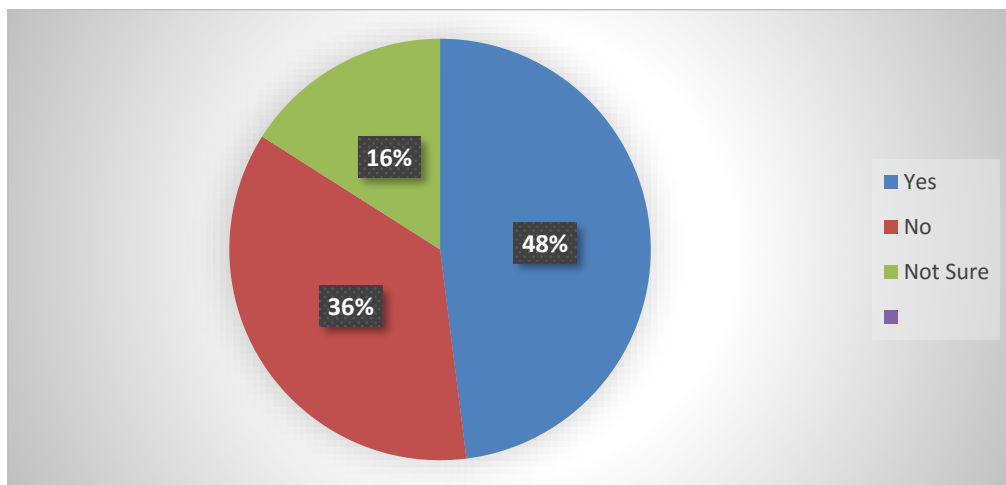




**Figure 7: Frequency of Students' Use of Email for Academic Purposes**

Only 16% (47 students) frequently use email for academic communication. A moderate 33% (99 students) reported occasional use, while more than half (51%, 154 students) rarely or never use email. This indicates a major gap in professional communication skills. Interviews confirmed that students from public and national universities rarely email their teachers, relying instead on verbal communication or messaging apps. Since email is essential in all job sectors, this lack

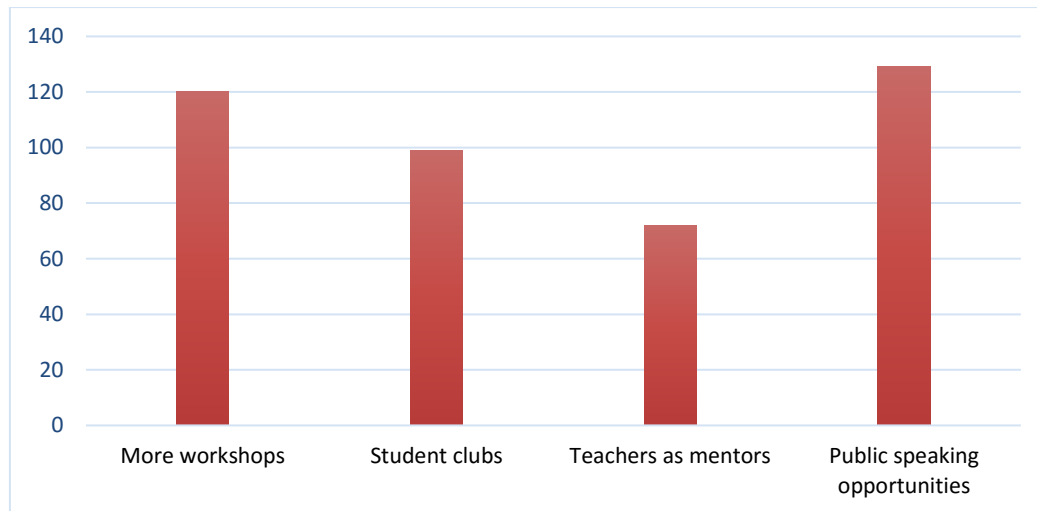
of practice will affect their employability. Interviews again support this, with a national university student saying, *"I have an email address, but I never used it to contact any teacher."* Another student commented, *"Teachers usually communicate verbally, so we don't need email."* Given that email is essential in professional environments, this figure highlights a major employability gap.



**Figure 8: Student's perception on availability of opportunities for improving leadership skills**

According to the survey, 48% of students (144) believe their institutions provide leadership opportunities. Meanwhile, 36% (108 students) feel they lack such opportunities, and 16% (48 students) are unsure. This uneven distribution mirrors interview findings: private university students often participate in clubs and event management, whereas national university students overwhelmingly reported having no clubs or leadership programs at all. This figure reinforces the need for universities to offer structured leadership-

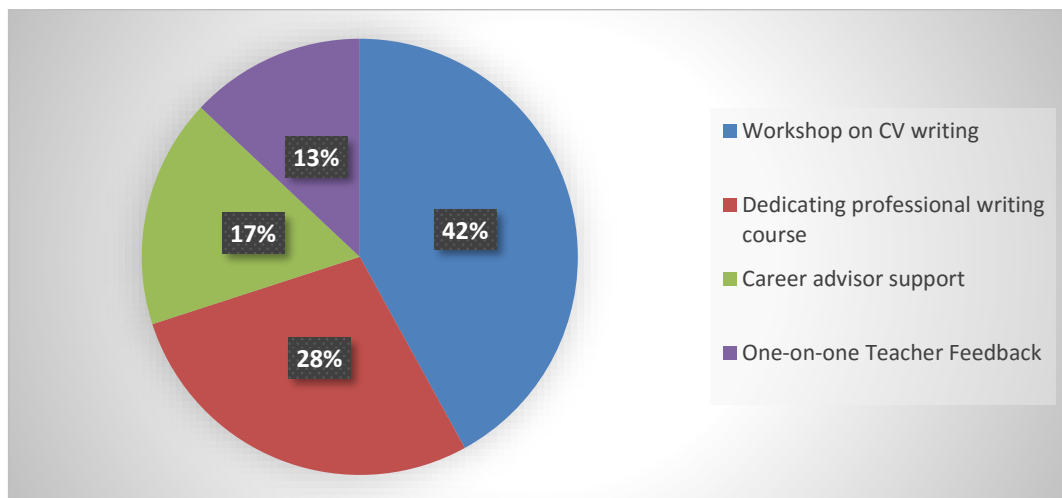
building activities. Private university students described participating in clubs and academic events, while national university students reported limited or no opportunities. One student remarked, *"We don't have active clubs, so we rarely get leadership roles."* In contrast, a private university student said, *"Our campus offers many events where we can lead teams."* This disparity makes it clear that leadership training remains inconsistent across institutions.



**Figure 9: Student's perception of developing leadership skills**

Students recommended several strategies to improve leadership skills, including more public speaking opportunities (43%, 129 students), workshops (40%, 120 students), and student committees (33%, 99 students). Additionally, 24% (72 students) suggested that teachers should act as mentors. These survey results align with interviews where students repeatedly emphasized the need for more practical activities and real opportunities to lead. Together, they point to a significant

gap in institutional support for leadership development. Interviews reveal similar expectations. One student expressed, *"If teachers guided us in planning events, we could learn leadership skills better."* Another commented, *"Workshops and real-life tasks help us grow more than theory."* This alignment between survey and interview data indicates a clear student demand for practical leadership experiences.



**Figure 10: Student's perception on improving CV writing skills**

A significant proportion of students (42%, 126 students) expressed the need for CV-writing workshops. Other suggestions included a dedicated professional writing course (28%, 84 students) and career advisor support (17%, 51 students). These responses strongly support interview data, which revealed that public and national university students receive little or no CV feedback from teachers. The figure emphasizes the importance of integrating employability training into the curriculum. Interview data reinforce this: one national university student said, *"I never wrote a CV before because no one taught us how to do it."* Another student commented, *"We need proper career counselors to*

*guide us."* This demonstrates the importance of integrating employability training into university curricula.

## DISCUSSION

Most English graduates in Northern Bangladesh still do not get enough scope to develop their soft skills, and this study strongly supports that reality through the combined findings of interviews with 50 students and survey responses from 300 participants. The curriculum of most institutions remains designed in such a way that teachers do not have to teach anything other than the academic texts. As a result, classrooms have become

completely teacher-centric, and students hardly get the chance to engage in activities that help them learn essential soft skills. Many national university students repeatedly mentioned that their classes are limited to lectures and note-taking, with no space for interactive tasks. One national university student said, “We only listen to lectures. There is no chance to speak, so I never learned any practical skill from my classes.” This reveals how deeply the problem is rooted in classroom practice.

The survey results show that 37% of the students (111 out of 300) rarely or only once a year give presentations. Due to this lack of exposure, 74.3% (223 students) reported feeling nervous or anxious when speaking in front of an audience. Many students fear failure because they simply do not get enough practice. As one public university student shared, “We only give one group presentation a year, so I depend on memorizing everything.” Interviews support this trend: private university students said they give around ten presentations per year, public university students said they give one group presentation per year, and national university students revealed that they hardly give any presentations at all. One private university student explained, “After presenting many times, speaking feels normal now.” In contrast, a national university student admitted, “I have never given any presentation, so I think I will panic in a real job interview.” These differences clearly show that presentation skill development strongly depends on institutional practice.

Leadership skills also remain underdeveloped among English literature students. According to the survey, 24.6% (74 students) stated that studying English literature does not help them build leadership abilities. The interview findings reveal that private university students sometimes gain leadership experience through club activities, event coordination, and team projects. Public university students, however, only get occasional opportunities through events that happen once a year, while national university students hardly get any. One national university student said, “There are no clubs, no committees—nothing where we can learn leadership.” A public university student expressed, “We lead sometimes during cultural functions, but those events rarely happen.” Leadership training remains inconsistent and insufficient across institutions, leaving many students unprepared for leadership roles in the workplace.

The technological skill gap is another major issue. Survey findings indicate that 82.2% (247 out of 300) do not get proper training in Microsoft Office applications. Additionally, 19.2% (58 students) reported that they do not use such applications for academic work at all. With technology dominating modern job sectors, this lack of training puts students at a severe disadvantage. Interviews show that private university students regularly use Word, PowerPoint, and Google tools for assignments, presentations, and quizzes, which helps them develop technological competence naturally.

One private university student mentioned, “We have to use Word and PowerPoint for everything, so we automatically learn them.” Public university students mostly use Word only for typing, while national university students often avoid technological tasks altogether. One national university student said, “I avoid Excel because no one taught me how to use it.”

Professional communication, especially email writing, is also a significant weakness. Survey results show that only 15.7% (47 students) use email for academic communication. Most students rely on informal platforms such as Messenger or WhatsApp. A public university student admitted, “I never email teachers. I don’t know how to write a formal email.” This lack of email-writing practice suggests that many students may struggle with professional communication after graduation.

Career preparation, particularly CV writing and job searching, is another major area of concern. Survey findings show that 46.6% (140 students) do not receive any feedback on their CVs. Additionally, 27.4% (82 students) cannot write a cover letter, and 52.1% (156 students) said they need workshops on job searching strategies. From the interviews, it is clear that only private university students typically receive structured training on CV writing and interview techniques. One private university student said, “We learned how to write a CV through a professional writing course.” In contrast, a public university student said, “We never learned CV or cover letter writing in any class.” National university students are the most disadvantaged, as they reported having no institutional support for career preparation. As one student said, “We don’t know how to start preparing for jobs because no one guides us.”

Students’ use of Microsoft Excel is worryingly low. Survey results indicate that 112 students do not use Excel at all, and 58 students use it only for basic and occasional tasks. Even private university students mentioned that they rarely use Excel unless required for a specific task. A national university student remarked, “Excel feels complicated, and we never practiced it.” This highlights that while Word and PowerPoint are used more commonly, Excel training remains severely inadequate across all institutions.

The interviews clearly show that these soft skill gaps are not random—they are heavily influenced by institutional differences. Private universities, with multiple presentations, continuous assessments, group work, and club activities, provide better chances for soft skill development. Public universities offer very limited exposure, and national universities provide almost none. A national university student summarized the situation by saying, “We want to learn soft skills, but without support from the institution, we are completely helpless.”

The combined analysis of 300 survey responses and 50 interviews reveals that English literature students—especially from public and national universities—are not receiving adequate opportunities to develop soft skills that are essential for employability. Private university students are in a relatively better position, but even they desire more formal and structured soft skill training. The overall picture clearly indicates that without curricular reform and institutional support, students will continue to struggle to meet the expectations of Bangladesh's competitive job market. Establishing soft skill development as an integral part of the English curriculum is therefore not just beneficial, but necessary.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research works as a needs analysis of English literature students of three different types of institutions (private university students, private university students, and national university students) in northern Bangladesh who need proper training of soft skills for their future jobs from their universities. These three types of universities however do not satisfy the need equally. The private university is more conscious of the fact that students need extra guidance than just academic teaching. They have put two courses that focus solely on carrier development and soft skill development. Moreover, they organize job fairs from time to time and students are forced to give 10 presentations per year with proper slides and with proper etiquette. Despite all these efforts, students still feel the need for more events that will boost their confidence and soft skill abilities.

Sadly, where private university students are complaining about insufficient activities for soft skill development even though their university is working quite a lot to help the students, public university students are getting even less attention from their universities. Only once a year they have to give a group presentation and if the teacher does not want presentation to be the assessment method, they do not have to give any presentations at all. They have one course in the final year that focuses on carrier development; however, it mainly focuses on developing students' writing, ability.

Though public universities are at least doing something to improve students' soft skills, national universities are doing literally nothing. National university students are badly in need of proper assistance from their universities in this matter. They want to develop themselves and be prepared for future jobs but without their universities' help they cannot develop by themselves.

Future researchers should try to reach as many national university students as possible in this region to understand the gravity of the situation. Also, they should observe the policy makers' perception along with the students to navigate the problem from the root.

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