

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

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### Abstract

This study 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 skills: presentation skills, technological skills, leadership skills, job searching skills, and CV writing skills. A mixed-method research approach 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 undergraduate English literature students of 3 private universities, 2 public universities and 2 colleges under national university in northern Bangladesh. The results reveal that though students of the private universities get moderate help from the university for the development of their soft skills, public university students and especially national university students do not get that much assistance for their soft skills development.

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

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### INTRODUCTION

In this technological era when information is power, soft skills are the tools that utilize 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 to acquire a university degree (Yorke, 2006). English Literature is a noble discipline and studying it is really prestigious. However only studying literary works or mastering the language is not enough in this highly competitive world. Traditionally, literature in ESL classroom in universities 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 is time to find jobs they are found under qualified (Chan, 2021). Moreover, in this type of teaching where the classroom is teacher centric, students often do not feel connected to the topics and do not 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 to grab great opportunities in job sector. To outshine other candidates, one must have a good grip on such soft skills as presentation skills, technological skills, leadership skills, CV writing skills, job searching skills, and so on (Chaudhary & Rangnekar, 2017). Even if an English literature graduate aims to be a primary level teacher, they are required to be efficient in using technology like Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, etc. to cope up with modernized video-assisted learning classes. So, when even in primary level teaching jobs soft skills are so much essential, 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

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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. 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 job market (Chowdhury, 2024). Moreover, graduates who do not know how to find a job or where to find a job, what jobs are best for them are doomed from the very beginning. Unemployment in Bangladesh is undoubtedly one of the biggest problems that are holding back the country. Every year lots of graduates complete their higher education but do not get decent jobs. One of the crucial reasons behind this unemployment problem of graduates is during their undergraduate period, when students should start preparing for their future jobs, they only focus on their academic development and not on building soft skills. Here, the universities, to a great extent, are responsible for not helping the students to build up 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 *et al.* (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 when 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.

Researchers consistently show 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 it 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 contributes 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 searching 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 searching 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 details. 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 with 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 a 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 to real voices, explores how students feel, think, and reflect on the soft skills they gain during their studies.

### Research site

The study area covered 03 private universities, 02 public universities, and 02 colleges under the National University in northern Bangladesh. These universities were selected to show how different types of institutions view the importance of soft skill development among their graduates.

### Research Participants

This study focused on undergraduate English literature students of private, public, and national university in Northern Bangladesh. For qualitative approach, in total we conducted 50 undergraduate students' interviews from these institutions and they shared their personal experiences and feelings about both their academic experiences and how they shape their soft skills.

For quantitative approach, we used a structured survey and conducted it among English literature students of these institutions. 300 students participated in the survey. English literature students of

second year, third year, and final year were purposefully selected for both the interview and survey.

### Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through a mixed- method research. Here, the data for qualitative study is gained through open ended interviews and for quantitative analysis through a structured survey. These interviews included open ended questions that allowed students to share their thoughts freely.

### Interview and survey method

Interviews of the private university students were conducted face to face. However, all the other interviews were conducted online using Google Meet. Each interview was 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 interviewees controlled the direction of the interview.

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

### Data Analysis Process

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

### Ethical Issues and Concerns

During interviews and survey 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.

Furthermore, the survey ensured confidentiality and meant no physical and psychological harm to the participants.

## 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. 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**

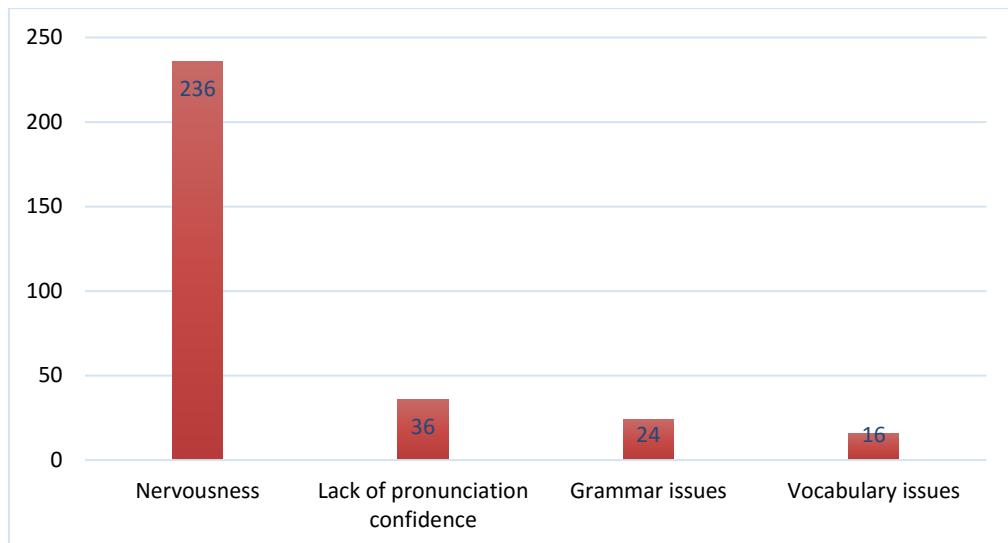
Across all groups, students agreed that universities should take an active role in developing soft skills alongside academic learning. Among the overall participants, 15 private university students, 13 public university students, and 14 national university students expressed that their universities need 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.

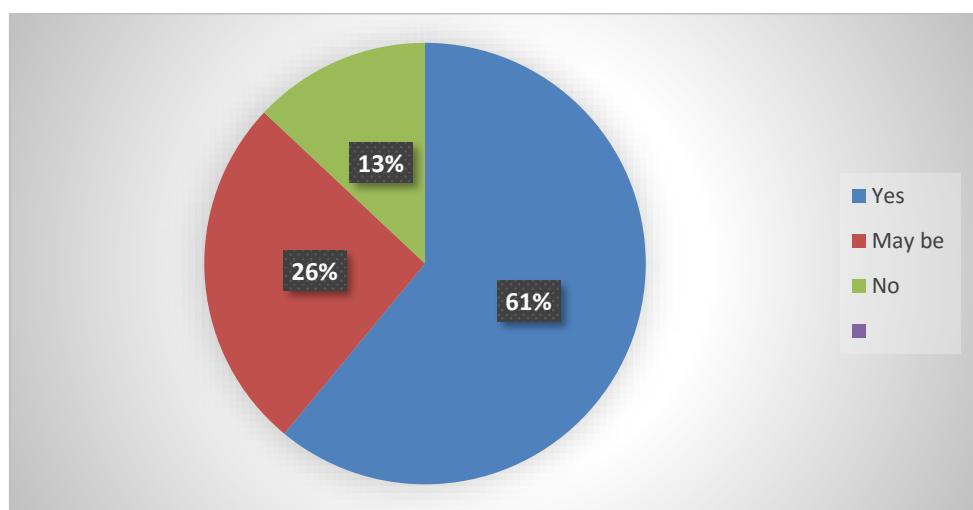
### Survey Analysis



**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.



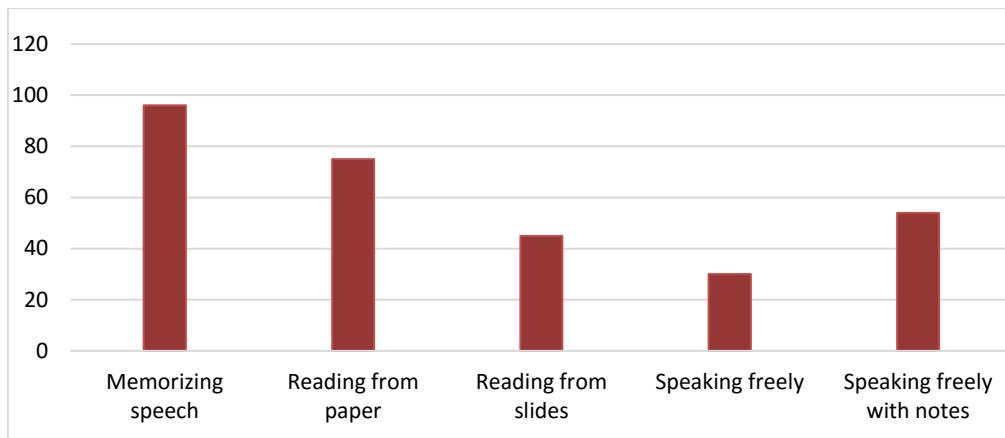
**Figure 2: Student's understanding on presentation etiquette**

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

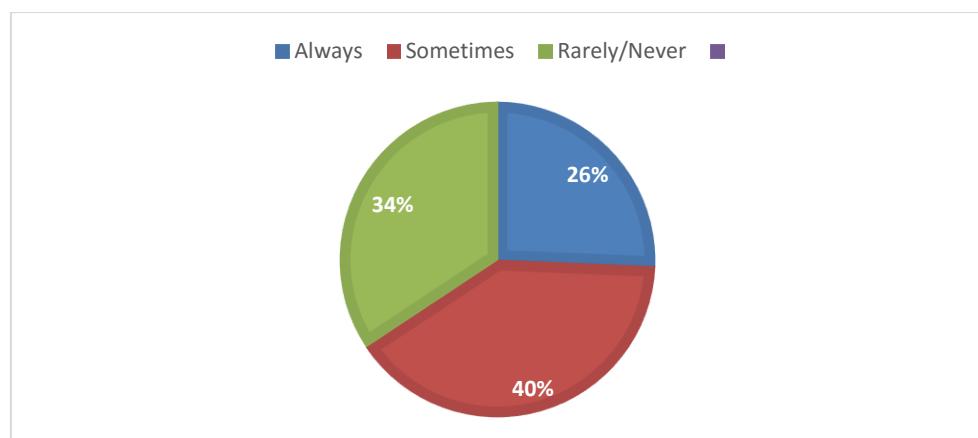
private university student said, *“Our teachers always remind us about dress code and slide structure.”* In contrast, a national university student admitted, *“I don’t know what presentation etiquette means because we never practiced it in class.”* Thus, the survey and interviews collectively point to 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.



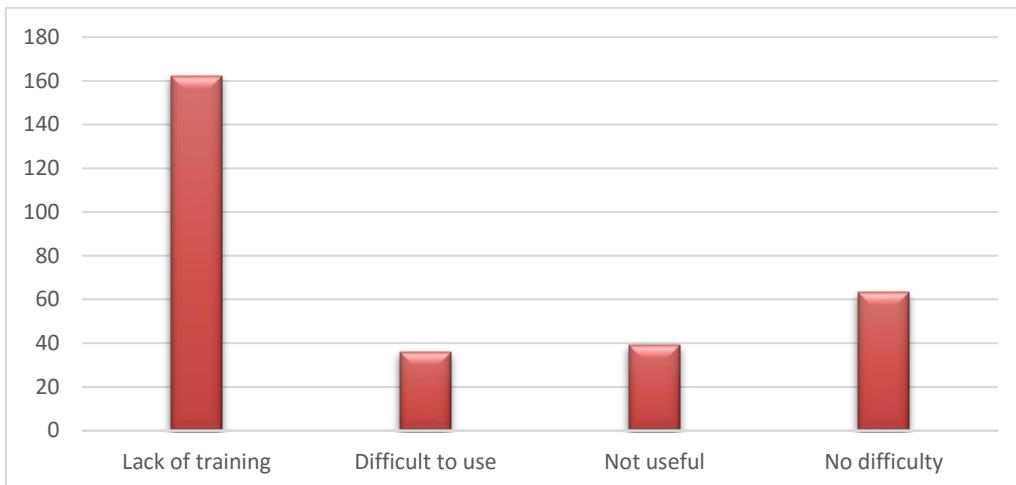
**Figure 4: Frequency levels of academic software use among students**

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

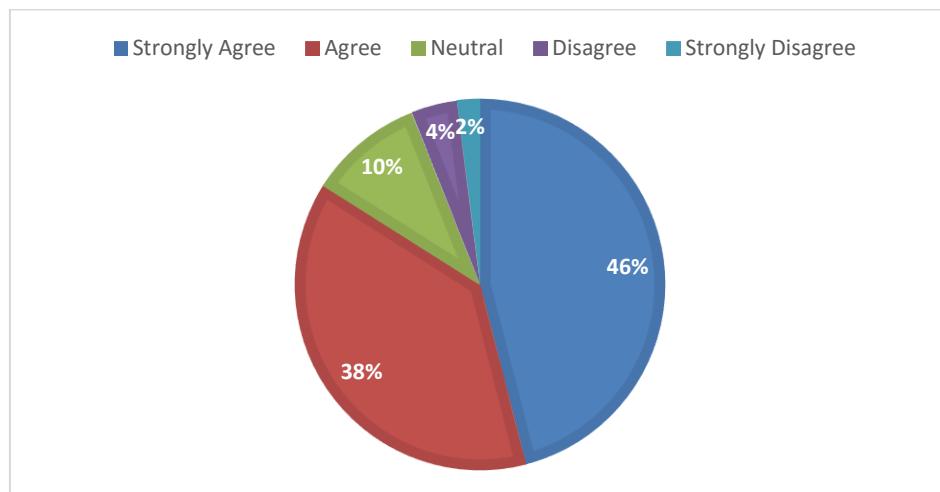
among students from different institutional backgrounds.



**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

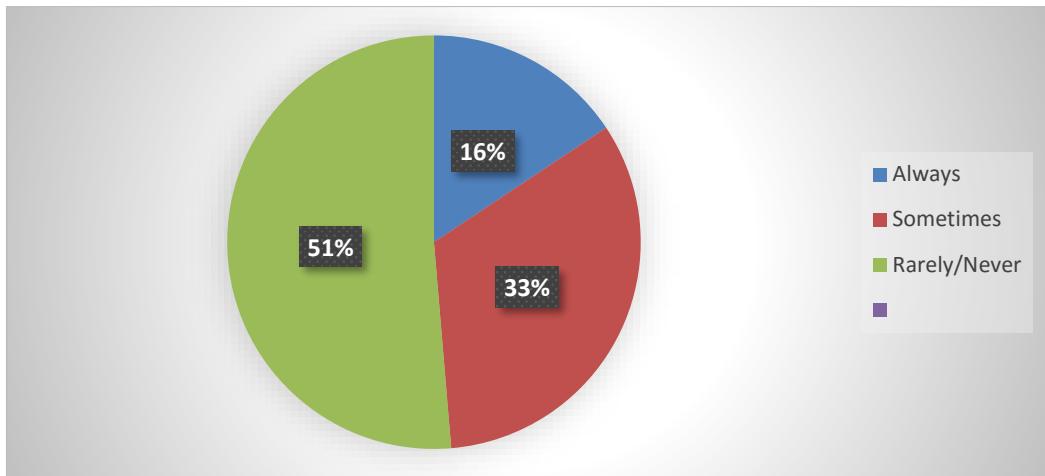
major technological barriers, which hinder students' academic performance and future job readiness. One student said, “*No teacher has ever taught us how to use Word or PowerPoint.*” Another added, “*I find Excel confusing because I never learned it properly.*” These responses explain why students face 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

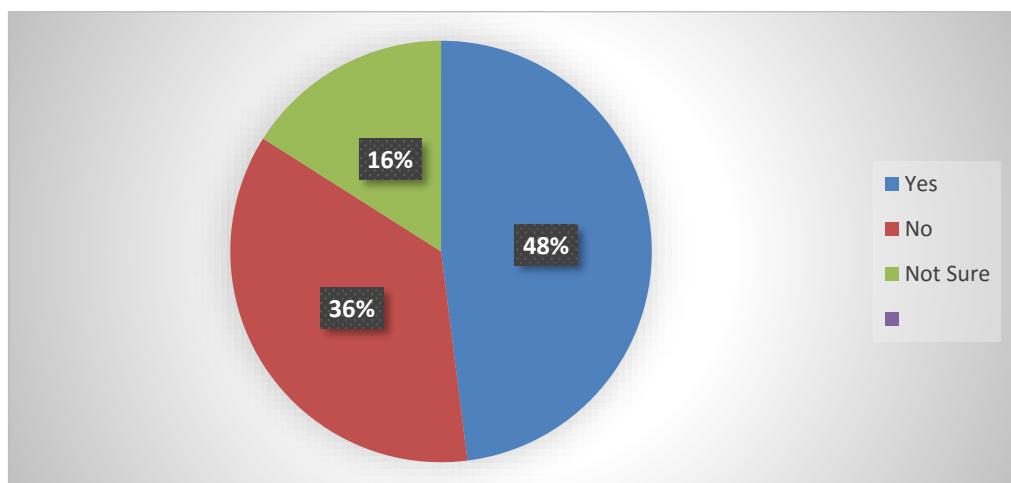
institutional offerings. One national university student shared, “*I know Microsoft skills are important, but I don't have anyone to teach me.*” Another participant remarked, “*If we had workshops on Word and PowerPoint, our assignments would improve.*” Thus, although students understand the value of 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

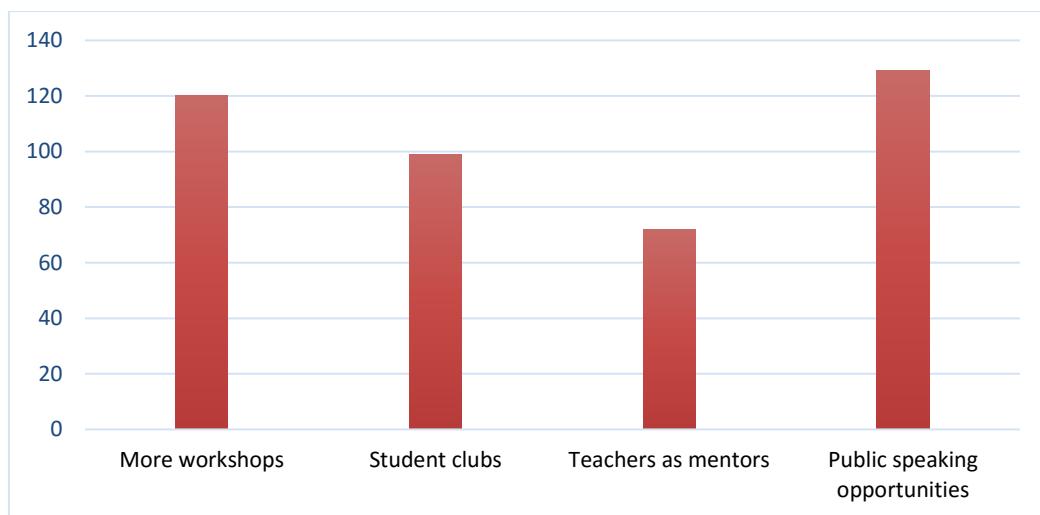
of practice will affect their employability. Interviews again support this, with a national university student saying, *"I have an email address, but I never used it to contact any teacher."* Another student commented, *"Teachers usually communicate verbally, so we don't need email."* Given that email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

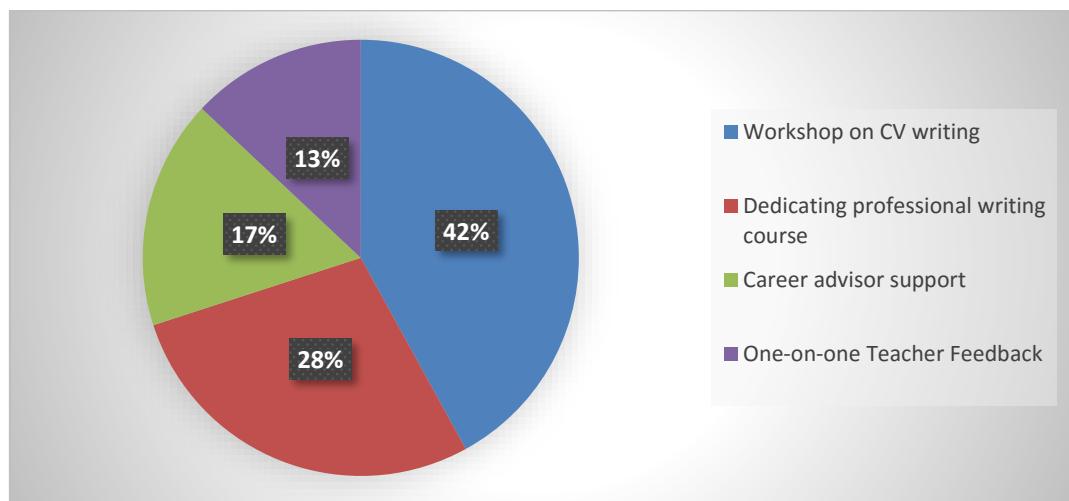
leadership-building activities. Private university students described participating in clubs and academic events, while national university students reported limited or no opportunities. One student remarked, *"We don't have active clubs, so we rarely get leadership roles."* In contrast, a private university 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 point toward a pervasive gap between institutional expectations and student needs. These

results strongly reinforce the concerns raised in the literature review, where scholars repeatedly noted that higher education in Bangladesh remained heavily academic-content oriented and insufficiently focused on practical skill development. Across presentation skills, technological literacy, leadership capacity, career readiness, and professional communication, the present study's findings align closely with previous research, indicating that the structural and pedagogical limitations identified years ago continue to persist.

A central finding of this study is the inadequate exposure to presentation activities, especially in public and national universities. While private university students reported regular and structured presentation tasks, most public university students participated only in occasional group presentations, and national university students had almost no experience at all. The survey data show that 74.5% of students struggle with nervousness when presenting—an overwhelming indicator of insufficient practice. This finding echoes Matteson, Anderson, and Boyden's (2016) argument that soft skills cannot develop without repeated engagement and performance-based learning. Ellis (2025) similarly emphasizes that presentation skills emerge through authentic communicative practices, not through passive classroom environments. The teacher-centered approach dominating many Bangladeshi classrooms, as highlighted in the literature, directly matches what students in this study described: a learning environment where lectures replace interaction, thereby preventing students from gaining the confidence and fluency necessary for academic or workplace communication. Thus, the findings strongly confirm earlier concerns that Bangladesh's English literature classrooms remain misaligned with skill-oriented educational demands.

Leadership development also shows a strong parallel with the literature. A significant portion of the students stated that their institutions provide little or no opportunity for leadership practice. Private universities offer relatively more chances—such as involvement in clubs, events, and group activities—but these opportunities are minimal in public universities and nearly absent in national universities. This aligns with Grigoropoulos & Grigoropoulos (2020), who highlight that leadership is closely connected to interpersonal communication, teamwork, emotional intelligence, and decision-making—all of which require consistent practice in structured settings. Rau's (2018) research on leadership emergence reinforces that student anxiety and lack of supportive environments hinder the development of leadership abilities. Students in this study—especially national university students—reported the absence of clubs or committees, demonstrating precisely the kind of institutional gap earlier scholars warned about. Hollander & Offermann's (1990) assertion that leadership requires

both positional and personal qualities becomes relevant here: without platforms to practice leadership roles, students cannot cultivate the skills necessary to guide teams or manage responsibilities in professional settings.

Technological skills form another major area where the results of this study match the issues described in previous research. The survey reveals that 82.2% of students have not received proper training in Microsoft Office applications, and interviews confirm that national university students often avoid using software because they were never taught how to do so. Rodrigues *et al.* (2021) and Cuevas *et al.* (2011) emphasize that technological literacy is now essential for educational success and future employability. Maldonado *et al.* (2016) further note that teachers must remain updated with technological pedagogy to guide students effectively. The data from this study mirror these concerns exactly. Private university students reported regular use of Word and PowerPoint for submitting assignments and giving presentations, which naturally improved their digital competence. In contrast, public and national university students expressed discomfort and even fear toward Excel and PowerPoint. This reflects the technological divide described in earlier scholarship: when institutions fail to integrate digital tools into academic practices, students graduate unprepared for modern job environments. The finding that 34% of surveyed students rarely or never use academic software underscores the severity of this gap.

Professional communication skills—particularly email writing—also align with concerns raised in the literature. This study found that over half of the surveyed students rarely or never use email for academic purposes. Instead, many rely on verbal communication or informal messaging apps. Given that professional settings rely heavily on email, this lack of practice indicates a serious employability gap. Earlier literature on soft skills repeatedly stressed the importance of communication etiquette, professionalism, and clarity in digital correspondence. The findings of this study reveal that such skills are not incorporated into academic training, particularly in public and national universities, which mirrors earlier critiques of Bangladesh's skill development frameworks.

Career preparation—particularly CV writing, cover letter development, and job-search strategies—emerged as another critical concern. Survey findings indicate that more than 46% of students have never received any feedback on their CVs, and interviews show that national university students often write CVs for the first time after graduation. This finding supports Vu & Le (2022), who observed that many institutions fail to supervise the CV writing process, leaving students to navigate professional

documentation alone. Aminah (2025) also emphasized that English CVs require specialized guidance, especially for students who aim to work in international organizations. The results of this study clearly affirm these claims: while private university students generally receive some formal instruction in professional writing, most public university students receive only theoretical content, and national university students receive no career-related support at all. The lack of structured training on job-search strategies further supports concerns raised by Hooft et al. (2021), who highlighted that job searching requires self-regulation, planning, and resilience—skills that students cannot develop without institutional guidance. Many national university students in this study expressed confusion about how and where to search for jobs, demonstrating the real-world consequences of insufficient career support.

The findings indicate that the concerns raised by earlier scholars regarding insufficient soft skill training in Bangladeshi higher education remain unresolved. Despite global shifts toward skill-based curricula, the academic system in Northern Bangladesh continues to focus primarily on theoretical content. Unless institutions—particularly public and national universities—take systematic steps to integrate soft skills into their teaching practices, English literature graduates will continue to face challenges in academic, professional, and personal domains. The alignment between this study's findings and the existing literature therefore underscores the urgent need for curricular reform, institutional support, and strategic interventions that prioritize practical skill development alongside academic learning.

## 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 universities are more conscious of the fact that students need extra guidance than just academic teaching. They teach 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 conference 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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