

# The Implementation of Soft Skills in Kosova's High Schools

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**Abstract:** - Soft skills are of great importance in one's education and social interactions. These skills are known to be highly needed and required for employment. Considering the benefits of the acquisition of the soft skills acquisition, the implementation of them in education is a necessity. Due to this, the aim of this research was to investigate where Kosova stands with the implementation of these skills, at the same time which skills are mostly used. Simultaneously aiming to understand Kosovar students' approaches to these skills. A quantitative questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection and 115 students from different high schools of different fields of study participated voluntarily in this research. The results of this study show that soft skills are being implemented in Kosova's education in high schools, however this contradicts with other existing studies conducted in Kosova from different approaches and perspectives. Nevertheless, teamwork results to be implemented the most amongst other soft skills, but it exceeds writings with a close difference of percentage. This paper analyzes and interprets the outcomes of the results, by backing up the arguments with factual sources to answer the two broad questions of the study.

**Key words:** soft skills, implementation, Kosova context.

## I. Introduction

Soft skills play a major role in everyday life situations, in educational fields, and in one's employment. These skills refer to a wide group of social and personal traits that enable effective collaboration and facilitate social interactions amongst people (Hora, 2018). Thus, since the importance of the acquisition of these skills is at great extent, many researchers have considered it as an area of interest for their studies. This has led to the current number of studies done in this field in many different countries.

Soft skills include communication, leadership, problem-solving, critical thinking, interpersonal skills, and many more (Canney & Byrne, 2006), however this research was mainly focused on presentations, writings, critical thinking, teamwork, and debates since they are considered to be the fundamental components of soft skills.

This research aims to analyze the implementation of soft skills in Kosova's high schools. The current study will try to answer two broad questions: which soft skills, if any, are implemented in Kosova's high schools and simultaneously discover students' experiences and perceptions of these skills. While many countries pay great attention to soft skills, respectively to the incorporation of these skills in education, the researchers of this study tried to shed light on the aspect of education in Kosova's context. Considering the fact that Kosova is in an ongoing development, this research can play an important role in addressing the issue of well understanding the key role of soft skills by students of high school.

## II. Literature Review

Soft skills are attributes that characterize and form one's personality (Kenton & Abbott, 2019; Schulz, 2008), and include many types of skills, competencies, behaviors, and personal qualities which facilitate the relationship among people and make them more flexible for various situations (Lippman, Ryberg, Carney, Moore, & Trends, 2015). These skills are usually underestimated by the majority of people when put along with hard skills by evaluating them as easy skills to be learned, while in fact these skills are more complex than thought to be (Willmot & Colman, 2016). These skills are apparently being introduced mostly in university as skills needed to prepare students for the labour market and a lack of implementation of them is seen in primary and secondary school, and also in high school. However, as pointed out above, these skills are not easy to be learned, one needs time and practice to acquire and improve them, in contrast to hard skills which can be learned theoretically. Thus, individuals must be introduced to soft skills at an early stage of life, starting from the family environment and early at primary school (Cimatti, 2016). Ideally, soft skills should be introduced to pupils of primary school in a more general aspect, adapting them to their level of acquisition, thus they can be familiar with these skills and would be able to express their thoughts better by increasing students' confidence. Once they become familiar with soft skills, it would be easier for them to develop and master the skills during high school, which then are needed for their future studies and required for their future possible employment. Also Schultz (2008) agrees that these skills increase students' performance in their professional career, and academically in different programs of studies (Sejzi, Aris, & Yuh, 2013; Premuzic, Artech, Bremner, Greven, & Furnham, 2010). However, despite the importance that these skills hold, many studies show that there is a gap in implementing soft skills in education. Very often the curricula are mostly focused on teaching hard skills, thus leaving less or no space at all for a possibility of incorporating soft skills in teaching methodologies (Schultz, 2008). Furthermore, he adds that teachers might miss the importance that soft skills hold, therefore they do not consider them noteworthy

to implement in their teaching. Likewise, Gallup and NWEA (2018) claim that time might be a problem since many teachers may consider teaching these skills as time consuming. Another reason for this gap can be the traditional theory-based methodologies of teaching which give prominence to theory over practice (Hagmann, Almekinders, Isubikal, & Hernandez, 2003). However Majid, Liming, Tong, and Raihana (2012) emphasize that soft skills should be embedded in the curriculum together with hard skills, without changing the curricula and thus students would have the opportunity to acquire both skills simultaneously.

### III. Methodology

This section will elaborate on the detailed process of how this study was conducted and also will indicate the methodologies used for data analysis. Firstly, the profile of the respondents and the number of the participants will be shown. Then, the instruments along with the process of data analysis will be discussed in details.

#### 3.1 Participants

The target group chosen for the main study were seniors from three high schools of different fields of study; gymnasium of social sciences “Ahmet Gashi”, professional school “Shtjefën Gjeqovi” (both located in Prishtinë), and gymnasium of natural sciences “Hivzi Sulejmani” in Fushë Kosovë. The total number of the approached students was 120; 40 students per school. However, 5 of them did not accept to participate, while 115 showed willingness to be part of the study. The main reason behind why seniors were chosen as the respondents of this study was firstly, their three - year experience in high school, meaning that they had more possible opportunities to try and use such skills in their learning; secondly, the fact that their next step in education is university and they might need such skills to enhance the success of their future studies. Whereas, the justification of the variety of aforementioned profiles of schools, is the difference that students of various profiles hold in their perspective of understanding soft skills, and that they might use different strategies to incorporate these skills in their classes.

#### 3.2 Instrument

The instrument used for data collection of this study was a quantitative and qualitative questionnaire survey. Questionnaires yield information on what participants perceptions of certain issues are according to their personal previous experiences (Dörnyei, 2007), thus, this was the reason why this instrument was chosen for the research. The first section of the questionnaire included information on the aim of the study and its credibility. The questionnaire preceded with the first set of questions about demographic data, followed by 15 closed-ended questions among which 4 were yes/no questions, while the remaining 11 questions were of multiple choice. Besides them, 2 final questions were of open-ended type, respectively specific- open and clarification questions

#### 3.3 Piloting

A pilot study was done prior to the main study. The pilot phase was conducted in gymnasium “Hivzi Sulejmani” in Fushë Kosovë, with 20 senior respondents who were randomly picked from different classrooms, both male and female. The piloting phase was meant to test out the questions and it enabled the researchers to identify the improvements which needed to be done. While the participants were filling out their questionnaires, the time was measured and thus it was found out that the students needed approximately 7 minutes to fill it in. When analysed, it was understood that the outcome of the piloting was mainly positive, there were only a few instructions of certain questions which needed to be improved in order to be clearer for the main study participants. A change that needed to be done was with questions 1 and 2 after one of the participants brought up a slight difficulty he encountered when answering those questions.

In question 1 the participant had to answer with yes or no when asked whether they do presentations. The second question was based on the first answer, where the question says if yes, how often within a semester you do presentations. The participant had answered no in the first question and then he said that it was a little bit confusing for him because he did not know how to answer on the second question. Besides this, they did not have other problems regarding the questionnaire.

In regards to the difficulty one participant encountered with question 1 and 2, after the results were discussed between the researchers it was found out that a few students had the same confusion on the same type of questions, so it was decided to slightly alter the instruction by adding more information on what to do if their answer is no. After the discussion the researchers noted that the participants had problems in understanding the terms “implementation” (in Albanian “implementim”) and “soft skills” (in Albanian “aftësi të buta”) so they were changed into “zbatim” and “shkathësi të buta”. No other changes were made on the questionnaire because the remaining questions seemed to be simple and clear for the participants based on their feedback.

#### 3.4 Data Collection

Data collection was done on three of aforementioned schools. The whole data collection phase for the main study was completed within two days. The questionnaire was distributed to 120 students. Forty (40) copies of the questionnaire were distributed on paper into two classrooms per school. The participants were informed beforehand what the purpose of the questionnaire was and how they should fill out the questionnaire. The instructions were given orally by the researchers to students

despite the fact that they also had them written in the questionnaire. Upon handing out the questionnaires the participants were informed why they were chosen as our target respondents. Also, the respondents were explicitly told that the questionnaire was completely anonymous and that it would not take them more than 7 minutes to fill it in. Their participation was based on their willingness and their responses would be used for the purposes of this study only. They were instructed to feel free to ask questions for anything they did not understand. Knowing that the participation was voluntarily, out of 120 students only 115 accepted to participate in the study. The data collection proved to be successful and enabled to move forward with the main study analysis.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The analysis of this self-administered questionnaire was done manually by the researchers, using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. For each of the questions results were drawn separately, then transferred into percentage. The same method of analysis was used for each option of each closed- ended question, for schools separately, and then these results were joined together from all three schools in a final percentage regarding each option. The other method used for the data analysis was codifying open-ended questions, respectively using one word or phrases to group the answers together (Saldana, 2008). Finally, a deeper analysis on each set of question regarding one type of soft skill was done to conclude the frequency of its usage and students' perception on how much they find it helpful for their future studies and employment. The comparison was done between three representative schools to highlight the differences between the students' perspectives from various fields of study. The final phase included the understanding and reasoning of the usage of soft skills in Kosova's high schools in general.

## IV. Results

As shown in figure 1, amongst the soft skills that this study has focused on, teamwork leads with 78.18%, following by writings 77.27%, and presentations 62.72%.

The results of critical thinking as a soft skill are not included in the charts below since it was approached only through one component of it, however the results from the study show that 60.4% of the respondents have said that they feel free to express their opinions in their classes. As for debates, the results will be not be included due to contradictory results.

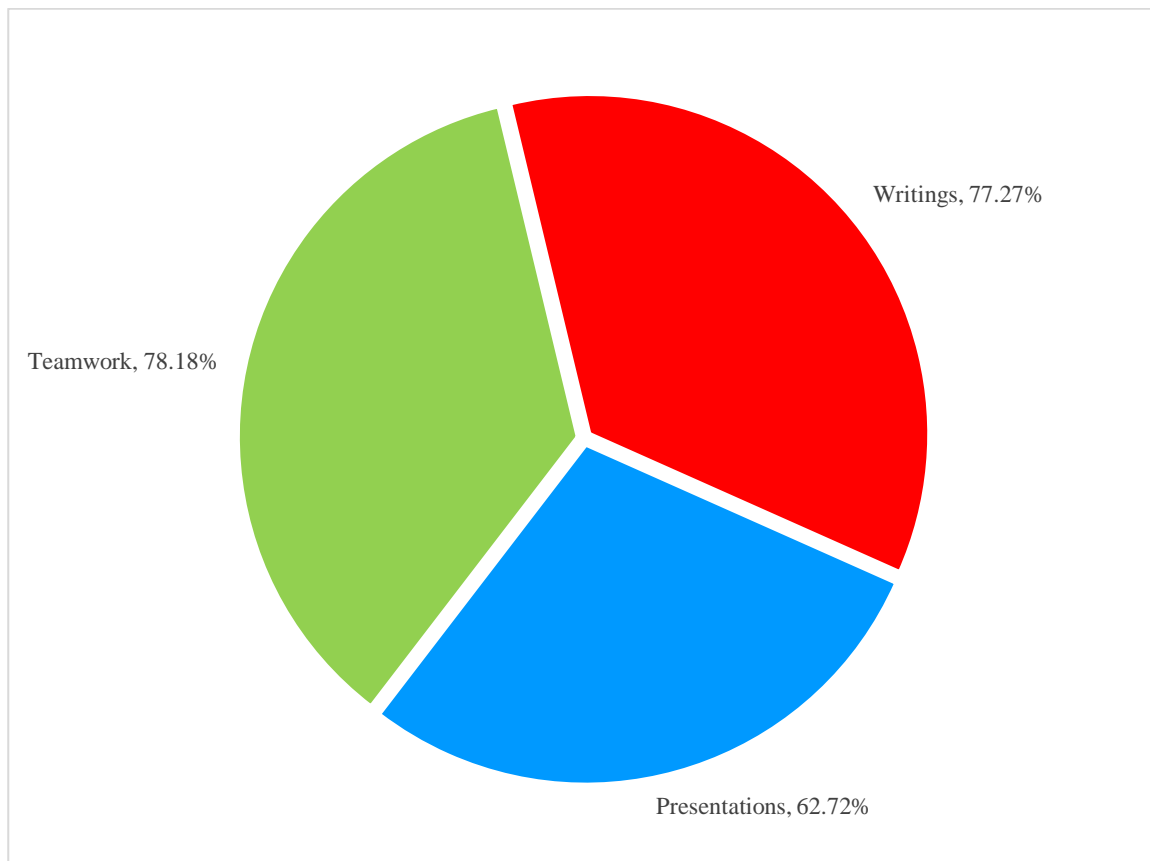


Figure 1. The total percentage of the implementation of soft skills

Figure 2 compares the detailed results of each soft skill usage in three different schools, as presented below:

**Presentations**

Regarding presentations, gymnasium of social sciences “Ahmet Gashi” in Prishtinë leads with the highest percentage of usage (79.41%), followed by gymnasium of natural sciences “Hivzi Sulejmani” in Fushë Kosovë (61.53%), and with the lowest percentage of 48.64% stands the professional school “Shtjefën Gjeqovi” in Prishtinë.

**Teamwork**

The comparison between the three schools shows that “Ahmet Gashi” again stands out with an 83.33% regarding the implementation of teamwork in classroom environments. Whereas 80% of the respondents of “Shtjefën Gjeqovi” and 71.79% of “Hivzi Sulejmani” participants reported that they work in groups.

**Writings**

If we turn to writings, it is apparent from the chart below that the professional school “Shtjefën Gjeqovi” stands out against the other two gymnasiums with 94%, while the latter ones stand close to each other with a difference of 5%.

**Critical Thinking**

Comparing the three results, it can be seen that the majority of the participants of all three schools have a positive attitude towards the component used in regards of critical thinking with a slight difference amongst them.

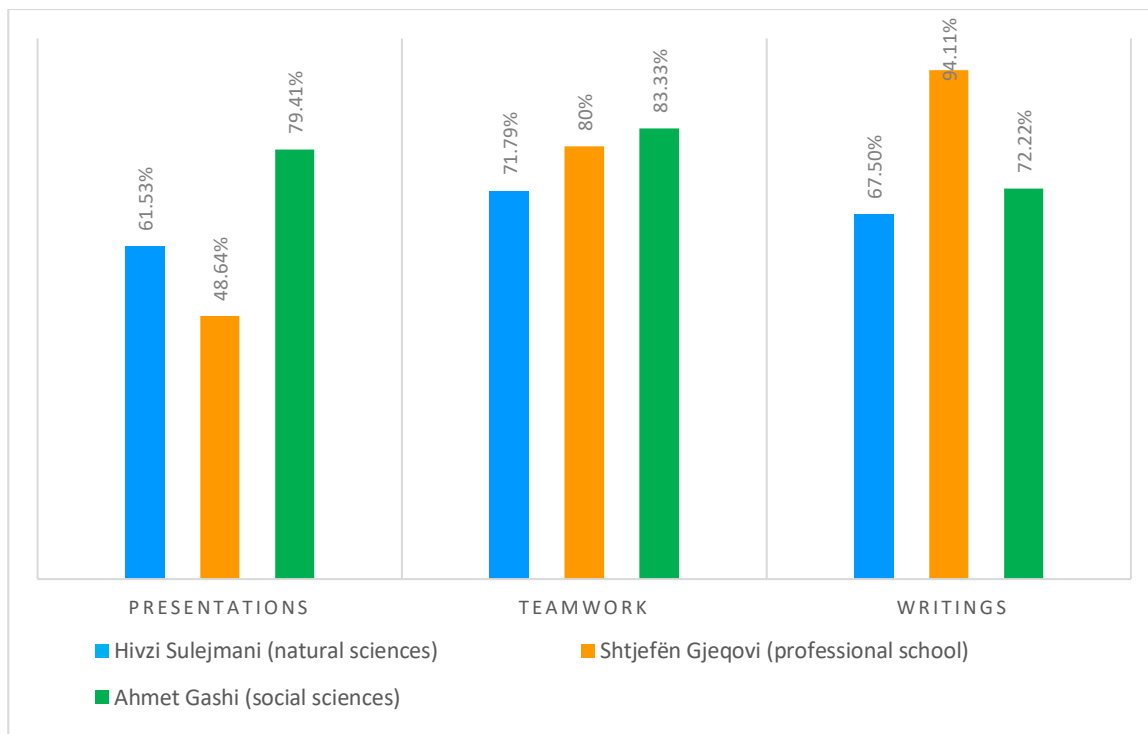


Figure 2. Comparison between the results of three schools

**V. Discussion**

This study sets out to explore the incorporation of soft skills as well as students’ understanding of their benefits in Kosova. The researchers of this study will try to analyze and interpret the data, and in this way give answer to the study’s research questions such as: Which soft skills, if any, are used in high schools? And, what are high school students’ experiences with soft skills?

As it was emphasized many times throughout this article, the importance of embedding soft skills in the curricula is to a great extent. The importance of this study stands in pointing out where Kosova stands when it comes to terms of new teaching methodologies which combine theory and practice, respectively soft skills with hard skills. In other words, if soft skills are being learned and utilized.

### ***Which soft skills, if any, are used in high schools?***

An initial objective of the project was to identify which skills are used in high schools in Kosova, if in the first place they are being implemented. The outcome of this objective turned out to be positive. Of 5 presented soft skills in this article, 4 of them being teamwork, writings, presentations, and critical thinking resulted to be used to a great extent, whereas only the set of questions on debates could not be included in this analysis because of its contradictory results, which will be further elaborated in limitation section.

The pie chart in figure 1 shows a slight distinction of only 1% between the usage of teamwork and writings in classes. However, presentation does not stand far from the two aforementioned skills. More than half of the respondents have claimed that they do presentations in their classes.

The majority of the participants expressed a positive attitude towards critical thinking. However, it must be noted that only one component of critical thinking was included in the questions, this due to their probable difficulties to clearly understand the notion of “critical thinking”. It was approached through two different aspects, firstly, how much they use the opportunity to express their opinions and secondly, whether they are encouraged by their professors to speak up in class. Regarding the first aspect, from 5 given options ranking from “never” to “always”, the most chosen option turned out to be “sufficiently” with a 43.8%.

Such results give rise to the possibility that students’ role has been changing slowly through years from a passive learner to an active one, where they can feel free to express their thoughts and ideas (*Teaching thinking for effective learning, 1995*).

Turning now to the evidence on the second aspect, 32.1% of the respondents felt motivated by their teachers to speak up freely in the class, by choosing the option “a lot” among the other abovementioned options. This indicates that students do not feel afraid or ashamed to speak up in the classroom, however this percentage indicates that they still are not encouraged to a satisfactory level.

### ***What are high school students' experiences with soft skills?***

Regarding the students’ evaluation on the impact that soft skills carry for their future, the majority of the respondents agreed that these skills hold a great importance for their future. They perceived them as helpful for their further studies and future employment.

In the final part of the survey the participants were asked to indicate in which subjects they incorporate soft skills more. The results obtained from the data analysis indicate that teamwork, critical thinking, writings are mostly used in social subjects. Surprisingly, presentations resulted to be mostly used in natural and professional subjects. This may be reasoned from the fact that students have different perspectives on understanding the connotation of presentations. While some students perceive presentations as speaking in front of a larger audience, others might consider practical work or demonstration of any experiment as a presentation.

Taken together, these results suggest that soft skills are being implemented in Kosova’s high schools at a satisfactory level. However, some other studies conducted in Kosova regarding education and employment have proven the opposite.

According to PISA (2015) the vast majority of Kosova’s tested students did not demonstrate the basic skills needed to be acquired by the age of 15. This might be as an outcome of students’ ways of learning things, which most often happens to be by heart. Also because most probably teachers stick to the curriculum and they do not step out of the box to try new strategies of teaching the lessons.

This gap on Kosova’s education impacts the high rate of unemployment in Kosova, as the World Bank Report (2019) indicates that 2/3 of the working age population is unemployed.

This contradiction may be as a result of students’ misunderstanding of the implementation of soft skills. There is the possibility that they might have done a single presentation during one semester, yet they consider that one presentation per semester is enough. In addition, they also might not be introduced to presentation rules, therefore, whatever they say and however they act in front of an audience, they consider it as a presentation. The same applies to writings, where students may count any assignment as a writing task.

Teacher lack of training and teacher-centeredness derived from the traditional education system might cause this stagnation in Kosova’s education system (Sommers & Buckland, 2004; Baliqi, 2010).

## **VI. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study aimed to understand if these skills under the connotation of soft skills, considered to be so important by many studies and researchers, are being implemented in Kosova’s high schools, and if yes, which of them are being taught to high school students. Through the analysis of the data, it was understood that indeed these skills are being implemented in high schools,

however, it was left to understand that their incorporation is not being done properly. This referring to the outdrawn results, where high percentages have resulted for each set of soft skills, whereas when students of Kosova were tested from PISA they ranked very low in their demonstration of basic skills. Moreover, if these skills were to be implemented as such, students would have had these skills acquired earlier thus resulting in bigger opportunities for preparation for the labour market. However reports of the World Bank prove the opposite, which state that the rate of unemployment is very high due to the lack of skills of employee candidates that employers seek out.

What would be recommended for future studies of this field is to include a bigger number of representative schools of different fields of study such as medicine, technical, and economic, since more accurate results can be drawn from a wider perspective.

## VII. Limitations

One of the limitations that affected the whole study can be considered the selection of the low number of high schools, which were indicated to be considered as representatives for the whole country in general. Despite selecting a low number of high schools, there was little variation on regards to the fields of study that could have been analyzed. In addition, the research was conducted in an unsuitable time, considering the fact that the researchers wanted to investigate the implementation of soft skills in Kosova's high schools, respectively seniors that were on the final week of school, consequently this put the researchers in a problematic situation, where they found difficulties in finding the exact number of students that needed to participate on the study because they were not present in their classes.

Furthermore, a set of questions were considered to be limiting the results of the study. When analyzing the question if the students take part in debates and how often they do so, the results concluded to be contradictory with each other. When they were asked if they do debates, the majority of the respondents gave negative answers. The requirements of the question if their answer was no were to skip to the other question, however, even when they answered negatively, the majority responded in favour of participating in debates, despite the fact that they were not supposed to fill in that question. This could be argued that the students might not have seen the instruction due to the aesthetic form of the questionnaire, because the questions were close to each other, consequently they might have confused it for being a part of the previous question. However, it should be noted that during the piloting phase, the researchers did not encounter on such contradictory results because of the instruction, therefore they did not find it necessary to alter it prior to the main study. Finally, regardless of these limitations, the results still remain valid for further studies and investigations.

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APPENDIX

Pyetësor

Implementimi i shkathtësive të buta në shkollat e mesme në Kosovë

Qëllimi i këtij hulumtimi është të kuptojmë se sa zbatohen shkathtësitë e buta (prezantimet, esetë, debatet, mendimi kritik, puna në grupe) në shkollat e mesme në Kosovë dhe sa janë të informuar nxënësit rreth rëndësisë së tyre. Ky projekt është pjesë e një hulumtimi të bërë nga studentët e vitit të 4 të Departamentit të Gjuhës Angleze si pjesë e lëndës “Anglishtja për qëllime akademike 2”. Pyetësi do të bëhet në mënyrë anonime dhe ju drejtohet maturantëve përgjigjet e të cilëve do të përdoren vetëm për projektin në fjalë. Pjesëmarrja është vullnetare dhe plotësimi i këtij pyetësori mund të marrë 5-10 minuta nga koha juaj. Faleminderit për kohën tuaj!

Gjinia: M  F

**Në pyetjet e mëposhtme rrethoni një nga opsionet e dhëna**

1.A bëni prezantime? Po / Jo

**Nëse përgjigja juaj është jo, kaloni në pyetjen 3**

2. Nëse po, sa shpesh bëni prezantime brenda një gjysëmvetori?

- a) 1 – 2 herë
- b) 3 – 4 herë
- c) 5 – 6 herë
- d) Më shumë se 6 herë

3. A mendoni se prezantimet ju ndihmojnë të fitoni aftësi më të mira komunikuese?

- a) Aspak
- b) Deri diku
- c) Plotësisht

4. A shkruani ese? Po / Jo

**Nëse përgjigja juaj është jo, kaloni në pyetjen 6**

5. Nëse po, sa shpesh shkruani ese brenda një gjysëmvetori?

- a) 1 – 2 herë
- b) 3 – 4 herë
- c) 5 – 6 herë
- d) Më shumë se 6 herë

6.A mendoni se shkrimi i eseve ju ndihmon në të ardhmen për edukimin tuaj të mëtutjeshëm?

- a)Aspak
- b)Deri diku
- c)Plotësisht

7. Sa keni mundësi të shprehni mendimin tuaj lirshëm në orën mësimore?

- a) Aspak
- b) Jo mjaftueshëm
- c) Mjaftueshëm
- d) Shumë
- e) Cdo herë



8. Sa nxiteni nga profesorët të shprehni mendimin tuaj lirshëm?

- a) Aspak
- b) Jo mjaftueshëm
- c) Mjaftueshëm
- d) Shumë
- e) Cdo here

9. A merrni pjesë në debate? Po / Jo

**Nëse përgjigjja juaj është jo, kaloni në pyetjen 11**

10. Nëse po, sa shpesh merrni pjesë në debate brenda një gjysëmvetori?

- a) 1 – 2 herë
- b) 3 – 4 herë
- c) 5 – 6 herë
- d) Më shumë se 6 herë

11. A mendoni se pjesëmarrja në debate ju ndihmon në të ardhmen për edukimin tuaj të mëtutjeshëm?

- Aspak
- Deri diku
- Plotësisht

12. A bashkëpunoni në grupe? Po / Jo

**Nëse përgjigjja juaj është jo, kaloni në pyetjen 14**

13. Nëse po, sa shpesh bashkëpunoni me njëri – tjetrin brenda një gjysëmvetori?

- a) 1 – 2 herë
- b) 3 – 4 herë
- c) 5 – 6 herë
- d) Më shumë se 6 herë

14. Sa mendoni që ju ndihmon puna në grupe?

- a) Aspak
- b) Jo mjaftueshëm
- c) Mjaftueshëm
- d) Shumë

15. A mendoni se puna në grupe ju ndihmon që të bashkëpunoni më lehtë me stafin e punës tuaj të ardhshme?

- a) Aspak
- b) Deri diku
- c) Plotësisht

**Në pyetjet e mëposhtme shkruani përgjigjen tuaj me fjalë**

16. Në cilat lëndë mësimore i praktikoni më shumë këto aktivitete?

**Afër aktiviteteve të dhëna shkruani lëndën / lëndët në të cilat i praktikoni ato**

Prezantime \_\_\_\_\_

Ese \_\_\_\_\_

Debate \_\_\_\_\_

Mendimi kritik  
Puna në grupe

17. Cilat aktivitete do të dëshironit të përdoshin më shumë nga profesorët tuaj? Pse?

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### Questionnaire

#### The implementation of soft skills in Kosova's high schools

The purpose of this study is to understand how much soft skills are implemented (presentations, writings, debates, critical thinking, and teamwork) in Kosova's high schools and how much are students informed about their importance. This study is part of a research done by fourth year students of English and Literature Department as part of the subject "English for Academic Purposes 2". This questionnaire is anonymous and it targets seniors, whose answers will be used only for the project. The participation is voluntary and the filling of the questionnaire will only take 5-10 minutes from your time. Thank you for your time!

Gender: M  F

**In the questions below choose one of the options:**

1. Do you do presentations? Yes/No

**If your answer is no, continue to question 3**

2. If yes, how often do you do presentations within a semester?

- a) 1-2 times
- b) 3-4 times
- c) 5-6 times
- d) More than 6 times

3. Do you think presentations help you in gaining better communication skills?

- a) Not at all
- b) Somehow
- c) Completely

4. Do you write essays? Yes/ No

**If your answer is no, continue to question 6**

5. If yes, how often do you write essays within a semester?

- a) 1-2 times
- b) 3-4 times
- c) 5-6 times
- d) More than 6 times

6. Do you think essay writing will help you in your future education?

- a) Not at all
- b) Somehow
- c) Completely

7. How free do you feel in expressing your opinions in classes?

- a) Not at all
- b) Not sufficiently
- c) Sufficiently

- d)A lot
- e)Every time

8. How much are you encouraged by your professors to express your thought freely?

- a)Not at all
- b)Not sufficiently
- c)Sufficiently
- d)A lot
- e)Every time

9. Do you participate in debates? Yes/No

**If your answer is no, pass to question 11.**

10. If yes, how often do you participate in debates within a semester?

- 1-2 times
- 3-4 times
- 5-6 times
- More than 6 times

11. Do you think that participating in debates will help you in your future education?

- Not at all
- Somehow
- Completely

12. Do you work in groups? Yes/No

**If your answer is no, continue to question 14**

13. If yes, how often do you work in groups within a semester?

- a)1-2 times
- b)3-4 times
- c)5-6 times
- d)More than 6 times

14. Do you think teamwork is helpful for you?

- a)Not at all
- b)Not sufficiently
- c)Sufficiently
- d)A lot
- e)Every time

15. Do you think group work will help you to cooperate easier with your colleagues in your future job?

- a)Not at all
- b)Somehow
- c)Completely

**In the questions below, write your answer**

16. In which subjects do you mostly use these activities?

**Next to the given activities write the subject / subjects in which you practice them**

|                   |       |
|-------------------|-------|
| Presentations     | _____ |
| Essays            | _____ |
| Debates           | _____ |
| Critical thinking | _____ |
| Teamwork          | _____ |



17. Which activities would you like to be used more by your professors? Why?

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