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ABSTRACT

The research assessed the importance of social interaction outside class between lecturers and university students in training soft skills courses at FPT University in Ho Chi Minh City. The results of a random survey of 363 students studying at the university using questionnaires and in-depth interviews show the significant role of implementing and maintaining social interactions from various angles. The importance is increasing the interestingness of the lessons, thereby enhancing learning outcomes and the practical experience related to the course. So, they help those courses achieve the original purpose for which the school included them in the curriculum framework. Overall, most students have a relatively high level of satisfaction with their instructors in these social interactions. However, some lecturers are still cautious about this trend, thus causing student satisfaction levels to move in the opposite direction. Besides, the research also shows much lack of standards among students when their relationship with lecturers is no longer encapsulated in the classroom. Since then, the author has also come up with several solutions so that social interaction outside class can maximize its role in teaching and learning soft skills courses.
Keywords: Lecturers; Social Interaction; Soft Skills

INTRODUCTION

With the orientation of "Better by making differences," FPT University is always a pioneer in implementing new and bold strategies in teaching and learning. As part of that orientation, most of the lecturers of FPT University also have a very open mind, instead of the classics, rules, and dogmas like in many other traditional university environments in Vietnam. Because, amid a time when education is no longer a field in which the teacher is always the center, all respect and all truth must belong to the teacher, the learner's role is becoming increasingly more important. Today's most important thing in education is how learners can best grasp the lesson, apply it masterfully, and even develop further what they learn from the teacher (Mamurov, 2017). That's why, at FPT University, as a typical case, the image of a teacher with a simple, youthful outfit sitting in a cafe with students or funny comments on a particular topic on Facebook is what makes it unique can be easily seen.

The school is still fully equipped with portals for training activities such as FAP, LMS, FLM, etc. but other interactive channels like Facebook, Messenger, Zalo, Viber, Discord, etc. It is equally popular, especially among soft skills trainers and their students. Because many people say that soft skills teachers are the ones who have the most opportunities to help students effectively practice the skills learned in the courses. They can be communication skills, teamwork skills, business communication skills, critical thinking, design thinking, etc. However, as the saying goes, "every garden has its weeds," and when it

comes to this trend, that duality is no exception.

From the data, the author has collected and analyzed, the limitations of this trend and the solutions to overcome it will be discussed in the following sections so that social interaction outside class is truly one of the ways to enhance teaching in general and soft skills training for university students in particular. In this study, the research gap can be that the representativeness of the research samples is not high to some extent because these 363 students are from FPT University Ho Chi Minh City. Meanwhile, there are also quite a few other universities where Soft Skills courses are included in their training programs. Although this is considered a case study for research, this gap will likely be narrowed when more studies are conducted at other progressive universities in Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh City. Therefore, the research results will be more objective, accurate, and reflected.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

According to Li et al. (2020), the social brain of language is one of the most critical factors that create social interaction. Here, social interaction is observed and analyzed from a psychological perspective. This is a group of social behaviors that are indispensable for human development, especially in the field of education. Or in another study, research by Ellwood & Abrams (2018) stated that social interaction between teachers and learners, between learners, can help increase motivation and academic achievement many times.

Similar to Ellwood & Abrams, the study of Morrison et al. (2020) also clearly shows that social cognition and its interactions will help autistic and non-autistic adults improve disease and increase growth effectiveness in understanding and learning. Thus, here we can more or less deny the importance of social interaction for education. However, the usual and encapsulated social interactions in the classroom were almost always the bare minimum that all classes had. Therefore, this study does not stop there but also expands to include face-to-face interactions outside of school hours or exchanges through social media and social network sites that learners and teachers can do together. It was discussed by Greenhow & Askari in their research in 2017. Accordingly, they contribute to the class by improving student work and interest in teaching because teachers can better understand most learners' characteristics, personality points, strengths, and weaknesses. In a similar approach to discussing student-faculty relationships, in 2018, Ingraham et al. studied and concluded that these relationships have a significant and significant influence on learners' learning outcomes. Precisely, the quality of these relationships reflects quite clearly and is directly proportional to the learning outcomes of many learners, specifically in this study, students in the nursing field.

In Vietnam, Diep and Thi (2019) also discussed the importance of the teacher-student relationship in university teaching, especially in public speaking modules. Previously, in 2017, Phan and his colleagues also mentioned this topic when discussing student stress. This study developed a conceptual model from the literature, showing the multidimensionality of stress with academic origins, student-faculty relationships, financial factors, and family. Accordingly, in this study, the student-faculty relationship

is an indispensable factor in understanding students' stress management source, status, and solution during student life in Vietnam. In the training of soft skills courses, Sousa & Rocha (2017) more or less mentioned that social interaction is indispensable when bringing games into the classes. Of course, it helps learners understand the lesson more easily and vividly. However, in this study, those social interactions were mainly confined to the school campus and person-to-person. In addition, according to Cotet et al. (2017), social interaction is part of the soft skills assessment process required by Industry 4.0. Thus, more or less, the importance of social interaction outside class in soft skills training is not an old topic. However, developing it beyond the framework of the classroom, and doing it naturally, as part of the daily life, between the trainer and the trainee, is a relatively new topic, especially in Vietnam.

METHODOLOGY

Methods of data collection

In this study, the author uses secondary data collected from the statistics of the Department of Training Organization and Management, the Testing Department of FPT University.

In addition, the primary data was also collected through a questionnaire survey for students studying at FPT University Ho Chi Minh City. The sample is selected by random method, and the sample size (n) is calculated using Slovin's formula (1960):

$$n=N(1+N*e2)$$

where N is the Population, and e is the False standard number.

Based on statistics from the Department of Training Organization and Management, the total number of students who have studied soft skills courses in the Spring 2022 semester is 2532. At FPT University, soft skills courses are arranged in semesters 1,2,5, and 9. Specifically, students in the first semester will study the "Academic Skills for University Success" course. In this course, students will study five MOOCs, including Introduction to Information & Digital Literacy for University Success, Introduction to Problem-Solving Skill for University Success, Critical Thinking Skills for University Success, Communication Skills for University Success, and Academic Skills for University Success: Capstone. Then, in the second semester, students will study the "Communication and In-Group Working Skills" course. This course is considered an introductory course for FPT university students because from this semester onwards; most subjects need this skill, especially in the last semester - the project or graduation thesis. In the fifth semester, students stand on the threshold of On-the-job training, or in other words, a semester at an enterprise or an internship period, students can study the "Advanced Business Communication" course. In this course, many essential skills related to the working environment will be trained for students, contributing to an effective and meaningful internship. Finally, before IT students enter the labor

market, the "Business Communication" course will help them consolidate the skills they have learned and compare and develop them to be used most effectively. Some of these skills can be mentioned, such as skills in writing emails, how to effectively convey negative messages, presentation skills, skills in preparing resumes and participating in interviews, etc.

With the expectation that the accuracy of the study is 95% (error of 5%), the sample size in this study is at least 345 students. To ensure the reliability and relevance of the data, the author conducted a pilot survey of 30 students; after carefully checking the inappropriate observed variables were removed to complete the questionnaire. After that, the official questionnaire was sent to students of different majors throughout the school via Email, Messenger, Zalo, etc., to do the survey. The study uses a data collection method based on simple random sampling through an online survey using the Google Form tool and face-to-face and online interviews via GoogleMeet. Sampling time was carried out in April 2022; after two weeks, 363 valid answers were collected to analyze the research paper results. In which 59 (16.25%) students are studying in the first Semester out of a total of 9 semesters at FPT University, 176 (48.48%) students are studying in the second Semester, and 26 (7.16%) students are studying 5th Semester, and 102 (28.10%) students are studying in Ninth Semester (the last Semester). The basic characteristics of the observed sample are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Demographic Available		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	t	58.68
	Female	134	36.91
	Others	16	4.41
		363	**100**
Semester No.	1	59	16.25
	2	176	48.48
	5	26	7.16
	9	102	28.10
		363	**100**
Major	IT	175	48.21
	Business	131	36.09
	Languages and Arts	57	15.70
		363	**100**

The results from the table above show that the number of answers obtained from male students is about 1.6 times that of female students. This ratio is a reasonably consistent result at FPT University because the proportion of male students here is always 1.4 to 2.2 times higher than that of female students. The proportion of students in the semesters is quite realistic, based on the total number of students in the Spring 2022 semester. Regarding majors, the university currently has many majors in three main groups:

IT (including Software Engineering, Information Assurance, Information Systems, Internet of Things, and Artificial Intelligence), Business (including International Business, Finance, Marketing, and Hotel Management), Tourism and Travel Management), and Languages and Arts (including English Studies, Japanese Studies, Korean Studies, Digital Art & Design, Multimedia Communication). In addition, the study also used the expert method to interview the seven lecturers in charge of teaching soft skills courses at the school to consult and evaluate the current situation of applying this trend inside and outside the classroom. Here, there is no specific number of hours that these lecturers interact with students by week, month, or semester. Just be informed that it is a daily activity that all of the above instructors have. It could be between slots, lunch breaks, social media hours, etc. From the above results, the author has proposed solutions to orient and adjust to apply social interaction outside class more effectively in the future. These are lecturers who not only have many years of experience in teaching and training these soft skills courses for FPT university students, but they also have much experience in the reality of the working environment. Since then, the teaching hours have been built and conveyed to the learners in a realistic, lively, and highly effective way. In addition, four of these seven lecturers are contributing members in compiling and adjusting the syllabus for these soft skills subjects. Therefore, the information obtained from these experts is essential, influential, and meaningful in this author's research.

Methods of data analysis

Descriptive statistics method: is used to summarize or describe the essential characteristics of a set of data collected through experimental research, shown as a number or a visual graph (according to Sternstein). The most commonly used numerical tools in descriptive statistics are the mean and the standard deviation. In addition, other common indicators such as absolute numbers, relative numbers, and time series of numbers are also used to show the phenomenon's magnitude, the phenomenon's variation of the phenomenon or to analyze the relationship between the variables and phenomena together. In this study, the descriptive statistics method describes the degree of application of social interaction of students in different majors and semesters. In addition, the method also shows learners' perceptions of the importance of social interactions outside the classroom to the effectiveness of soft skills learning. The limitations of both lecturers and students are also described in detail. From that, there are directions for adjustment and improvement. Comparative statistical method is used to compare indicators, phenomena have been quantified, has content and nature similarly to determine the trend, the level of variation performance of indicators. This method allows us to synthesize the standard points and separate the unique features of the compared phenomena, based on which the development or underdevelopment, efficiency, or inefficiencies can be assessed to find the optimal management solutions in each specific case. In this study, the comparative statistical method also clearly shows the differences from the perspectives of lecturers and students regarding the possible risks of enhancing interactions between these two groups outside the classroom. In addition, the method also shows how satisfied learners are when studying soft skills courses at FPT University.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perspectives of teachers and learners on the role of Social Interaction Outside Class in training soft skills

When talking with lecturers who directly teach and train soft skills courses for students, most agree that some social interaction channels should be applied outside the classroom to help increase effective teaching and learning. These channels can be mentioned as portals provided by the school, social networking sites such as Facebook, Messenger, Zalo, etc., or even meetings at cafes, restaurants, etc. With the same opinion as the author, the lecturers believe this contributes to shortening the gap between faculties and students. This huge gap has existed in Vietnam for a long time, with the influence of Confucianism (Thu et al., 2021). Besides, through these interactions outside of society, trainers, by chance, become role models for trainees, such as communication skills and business etiquette when eating at a particular restaurant, etc. Kha also agreed with this in his research in 2019. As such, these will be valuable opportunities for students to reinforce the theoretical parts learned in class and have the opportunity to practice them. As a result, students will long remember the skills learned and make them a part of their daily behavior, especially when graduating and entering the labor market in the near future. Futhermore, to some extent, students are customers, and lecturers are service providers. Needless to say, it is incredibly convenient to understand customers and the characteristics hidden under the iceberg; it is beneficial for teaching, especially training soft skills courses. As an old saying goes, "He who sees through life and death will meet most success." Thus, through these out-of-classroom interactions, teachers will better understand, and even profoundly understand, students' tastes, strengths, and difficulties, thereby making appropriate adjustments in imparting knowledge and skills to students. As Ward said, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires." (Ward, 2020); when we truly understand our learners, we can be easier on the road to becoming great teachers. Another prevalent thing is that in soft skills training, there are many significant differences compared to other specialized subjects; for example, teachers need to prepare many tools as well as many different scenarios for different topics (Sultanova et al., 2021). As such, these out-of-school interactions help make that preparation more thoughtful. Moreover, this preparation comes from the lecturers and students themselves. In some cases, they need to be a combination of preparation from both sides. Therefore, these interactions will collectively contribute to lively, meaningful, and effective learning hours.From the student's perspective, social interactions outside the classroom give them much benefits, which can be mentioned as the top most common reasons, as shown in Figure 1 below.
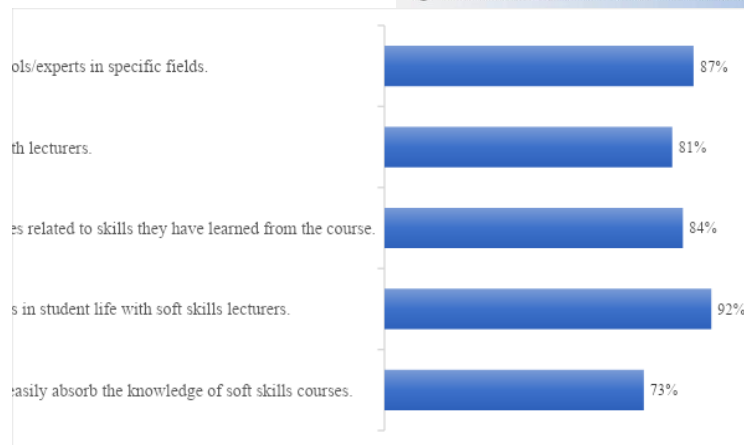
Figure 1: Perspectives of students on the role of Social Interaction Outside Class in training soft skills

Thus, the results of the figure above more or less show us that the need to interact with teachers outside the classroom is tremendous, simply because it gives students great benefits, especially in the field of learning. Assemble soft skills theory and practice those skills fluently. Accounting for the highest proportion (92%) is the second benefit (2) Students easily express their feelings and share difficulties in student life. To explain this, we can understand that, although there is a School Psychology Counseling Department at the school, it is not easy for students to open their hearts to people they never had or have had very little connection with. Instead, at the school,

the lecturers are the people who are close to and understand them best; both seniors can share helpful information related to life skills and give appropriate advice. In addition, the results also show other benefits directly related to soft skills courses, such as item (5) with 87%, item (3) with 84%, etc. Through that, students can have better preparation for the upcoming topic and the effectiveness in comprehending those contents. Explaining the results related to item (5) with the figure of 87%, we understand that social interactions through social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, etc., have contributed significantly to increasing people's understanding of their teachers. Nevertheless, to some extent, these insights are about expertise, work experience, sincerity in the market, etc. These methods not only help students to admire their teachers but also open them up to new and practical insights about the profession they are studying. Therefore, it is evident that the need to interact with teachers is normal and common among many learners. In this case, they are not much different from the need to connect with other experts in some field that the learner is interested in and is on the way to conquering. Finally, the number that can be said to be the easiest to explain is 84% for the third factor (3). Faculties are "lifesavers" for students in many emergencies related to skills they have learned from the course. Instead of waiting until class time to ask questions right in the lecture hall, an instant message or an email will be extremely fast, efficient, and timely. Moreover, in many cases where in-depth advice from lecturers is needed, a face-to-face or online meeting via Google Meet, Zoom, or a particular channel will undoubtedly be a perfect solution for students. , especially in the most urgent cases. Accordingly, many difficulties outside of study, such as love life, finance, relationships, etc., are also familiar topics but never get old in times of needing help from lecturers like this. So, the social interactions between faculty and students contribute to its importance in learning and other aspects of student life.

First of all, the author wants to assess the satisfaction level of students when studying soft skills courses at FPT University in general; the results of the overall satisfaction of 363 students are shown in Figure 2.
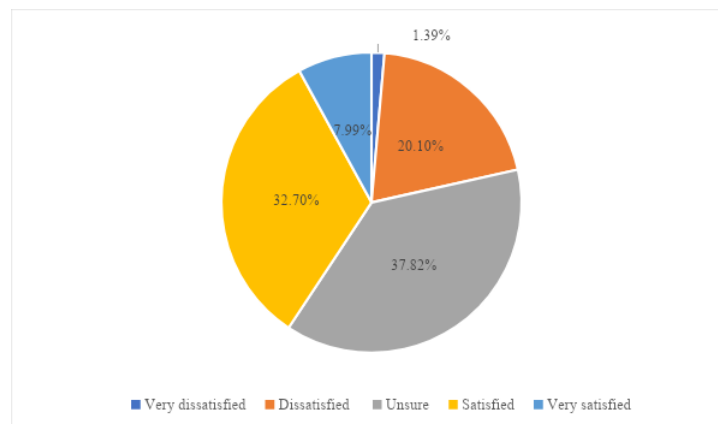

Figure 2: The satisfaction levels of students about soft skills courses at FPT University

The results from the above version show that, generally, students are pretty satisfied with the school's soft skills courses. Relatively high is Very satisfied (reaching 22.70%), and the lowest is Not at all satisfied (accounting for only 1.39%). The above results also have many similarities with the research of Ngo (2022) at FPT University Can Tho Campus. However, "Unsure" accounted for the highest proportion (37.82%), and Very Dissatisfied and Dissatisfied accounted for 28.09%. Thus, we need a realistic view of this, from which there are appropriate improvement solutions. Within the framework of this research, solutions will be given from the perspective of enhancing social interaction outside the classroom between lecturers and students. At FPT University, all majors include soft skills courses in mainstream learning. They are arranged for the first, second, and fifth semesters (before students attend On-the-job training Semester) and the ninth term (before students graduate); details are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Student response rates

Course	Code	Semester No.	Number of students (Spring 2022 Semester)	Number of Respondents	Percent
1. Academic Skills for University Success	SSL101c	1	1888	59	3.13
2. Communication and In-Group Working Skills	SSG104	2	399	176	44.11
3. Advanced Business Communication	SSB201	5	51	26	50.98
4. Business Communication	SSC102	9	194	102	52.58
			2532	**363**	

Accordingly, the first two courses, SSL101c, and SSG104 are for students of all disciplines at the university. In addition, the third course, SSB201, is only open to students in economic majors; and the fourth course, SSC102, is only open to students in the information technology majors. Thus, before graduating from FPT University, a student has at least possessed the knowledge and skills of at least three soft skills courses. Although the survey was conducted randomly and aimed at all students who took one of the soft skills courses in the Spring 2022 semester, it was evident that the response rate was different between the groups. The minuscule proportion, 3.13%, are students of the first semester, followed by students of the second semester with 44.11%, the third semester with 50.98%, and the ninth semester with 52.58%. Thus, the level of interaction of students with lecturers after spending much time at school, including interactions inside and outside the classroom, is undoubtedly one of the influencing factors, helping students to have both informative and yet bold enough to respond to the author's survey. When asked, "Which channel(s) do you usually interact with your soft skills lecturer(s) outside the class? Choose the most often one.", the answer was recorded in Figure 3.
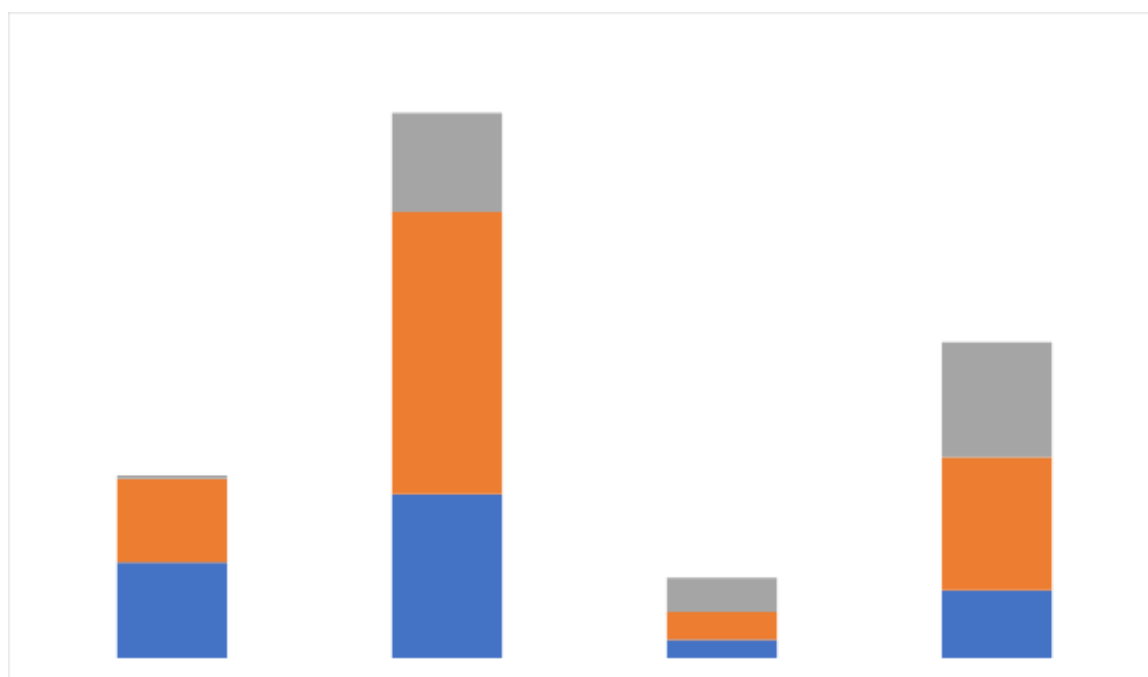

Figure 3: The most popular channels students often choose to interact with soft skills lecturers

The results from figure 2 show that, outside of school hours, first-year students tend to interact with their soft skills instructors through traditional channels (31 answers) and social media channels (27 responses), and only 1 response was for face-to-face appointments. So, it is clear that they need more encouragement to be bolder in communication skills to step out of the comfort zone of a laptop with a keyboard and a computer mouse - one of today's biggest pitfalls for Gen Z students. Also, this result is more or less because this SSL101c course is done most of the time that students are self-studying on Coursera, so meeting the lecturer /mentor of the subject is relatively meager. Instead, when students have questions, they will contact the mentor through the traditional channel of FAP or email. Therefore, along with the school's orientation to help students improve their self-study ability, and Coursera is one of the opportunities for that practice, the school also needs to pay more attention to freshmen, especially

when they take soft skills courses like SSL101c. Specifically, instead of organizing as currently 42 online hours (self-learning) plus 9 offline hours (meeting with mentors), it can be divided into 26 online hours (self-learning) plus 25 offline hours. Besides, instead of the class size of 50-60 students, it should still be kept at 30-35 students. By doing this, we not only help to enhance the interaction in class between lecturers and students but also initially give students the habit, boldness, and way of communicating with lecturers outside the classroom in practical and reasonable ways (Tsui, 2021).

In the following semesters, it is easy to see that the interaction on traditional channels tends to decrease as students have more experience at university. Instead, face-to-face meetings are shown at 32 answers, 11 answers, and 37 answers, respectively, in the second, fifth, and ninth semesters. Along with that trend, online communication on social networks has become more popular because it is fast, fun, and low-cost. However, regarding this interactive channel, soft skills trainers face some difficulties and challenges, which will be presented shortly.

The author has surveyed the students and lecturers to understand their perspective on the possible consequences when students and teachers teaching soft skills can interact outside class more often, primarily through social networks. The results are shown in the Figure 4.
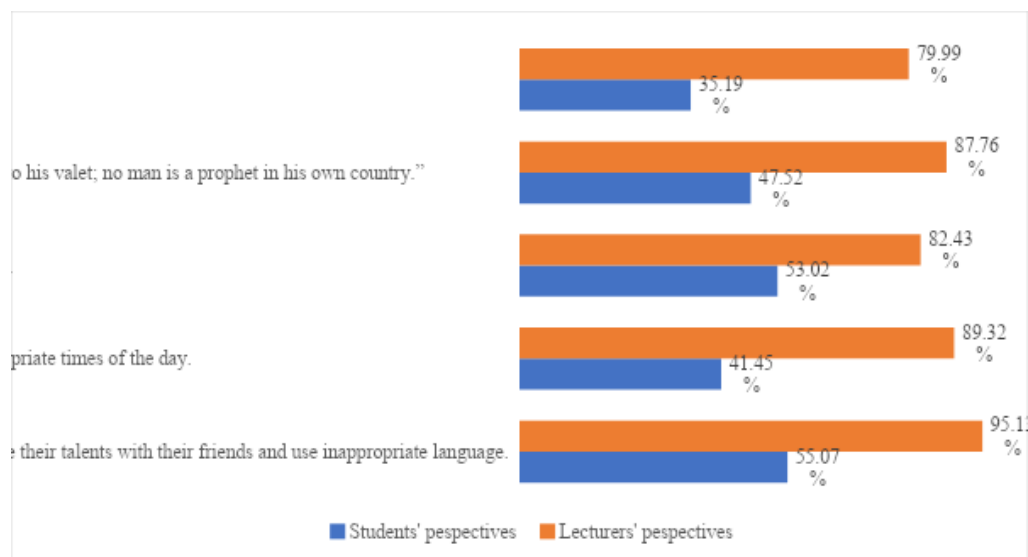

Figure 4: The agreement levels of students and lecturers about the possible consequences when students and soft skills lecturers can interact outside class more often.

In general, the statistics from Figure 3 show that from the student's point of view, the problems that the author poses are not very big. Only one out of five propositions are considered a big problem (53.02%); the rest are less than 50%. However, from the perspective of soft skills trainers, it is clear that these rates are much higher, even double. The highest risk is (1) with 95.13%, and the lowest is 79.99% for risk number (5). However, changing the students' assessment of this issue is also tricky. Because it is a perspective based on the evaluator's position, learners and teachers cannot have the same assessment on this issue. So, we need to have some solutions to overcome those limitations, to minimize the risk of the

above risks. Only then can enhancing social interactions outside of soft skills classes promote its effectiveness.

As for the soft skills lecturers, they need to cultivate not only their expertise and teaching skills but also the art of classroom management and student management so that students do not feel that the lecturer is too strict. Not too easy either. These skills will prevent students from equating teachers and friends, or students from asking for a raise in their score, etc. This is not simply a pedagogical skill but also the hard work and ingenuity of the class teacher. Because there are things that seem to be rules like "No man is a hero to his valet; no man is a prophet in his own country." are complicated things for us to adjust to. In short, the role of the trainer in overcoming these limitations is paramount and decisive. That is why the Faculty of Soft Skills needs to be very careful in selecting Soft Skills Lecturers. With the difficulties presented and the time and effort that soft skill teachers have to spend on teaching these subjects and making them more practical through social interactions outside the class, the school needs to have the support it deserves with clear policies on recognition of wages or appropriate remuneration. Thereby encouraging the lecturers' enthusiastic working spirit; the inevitable result is that students will be equipped and proficiently use the soft skills necessary for a citizen of the 4.0 era.

CONCLUSIONS

Research on the role of student-faculty social interaction outside class in teaching soft skills courses, a case study at FPT University Ho Chi Minh City, is an essential science. That contributes to finding solutions to help soft skills training become more effective than ever at the school. Within the framework of this study, enhancing social interactions will contribute significantly to improving learners' satisfaction with soft skills courses. At the same

time, the proposed solutions help promote enthusiasm in training these courses for university students so that what students learn is not just theory but practice and experience and is of long-term value for learners, especially in today's highly developed society – when the stereotypes about traditional education in Vietnam have changed so much, learners and teachers need to change to keep up with the progress of the times.

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