

## **PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT IN ECONOMICS STUDENTS: AN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE**

**SVETLANA BÎRSAN**

Department „Human resources, public affairs and communication”  
The Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova  
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova  
e-mail: [birsan.svetlana@ase.md](mailto:birsan.svetlana@ase.md)  
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8349-2714

**LUCIA CEPRAGA**

Department of Language and communication  
„Ion Creanga” State Pedagogical University of City  
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova  
e-mail: [cepraga.lucia@upsc.md](mailto:cepraga.lucia@upsc.md)  
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4253-2753

**Abstract:** The paper examines how undergraduate and master’s students at the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (ASEM) perceive and value hard and soft professional competences in relation to university education and labor market integration. The research is based on a praxiological approach aimed at identifying perceptual, attitudinal, and institutional dimensions associated with the development of professional skills. Methodologically, a questionnaire was administered to a sample of 114 respondents enrolled in various economic programs (Finance and Banking, Human Resource Management, Law, Business and Administration). The quantitative and qualitative data analysis revealed several relevant trends: students consider that professional success depends on a balance between technical and interpersonal competences, with 74% of respondents stating that both categories are equally important for employment. Among the most valued hard skills are digital literacy, financial analysis, and foreign language proficiency, while the key soft skills include effective communication, critical thinking, and adaptability. Most respondents positively assessed the contribution of professors (81.5%) and the institution (64%) to competence development, yet emphasized the need for a stronger practical dimension and enhanced collaboration with the professional environment. The findings confirm the necessity of an integrated curricular approach in which the development of hard and soft competences is complementary and contextualized. The study contributes to the formulation of educational strategies oriented toward strengthening transversal skills and consolidating the professional profile of economics graduates within the knowledge society.

**Keywords:** hard and soft competences; higher education; employability; transversal skills; praxiological research.

**JEL Classification:** I23, I25, M19, M53

### **1 Introduction**

Against the backdrop of profound changes marking the knowledge economy and the accelerated digitization of educational processes, the development of professional skills is becoming a strategic objective of contemporary higher education. Increasingly, universities are called upon not only to impart theoretical knowledge, but also to train specialists capable of responding to the dynamics of the labor market through a balanced set of hard and soft skills. In this perspective, recent studies (World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report, 2020; Romanenko, 2024) highlight that by 2025, more than half of the skills required on the market will require retraining, and critical thinking, adaptability, and communication will become essential for professional success.

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The literature clearly distinguishes between hard skills—associated with the technical, cognitive, and operational aspects of the profession—and soft skills, which reflect emotional intelligence, the ability to cooperate, and behavioral flexibility (Seattle Jobs Initiative, 2013; Parker, 2024). In practice, however, the boundary between the two categories is blurred, which requires integrative educational approaches. The training of modern professionals requires the interdependence of these skills, as performance in organizations depends simultaneously on technical competence and on how individuals communicate, collaborate, and manage complex situations.

In the Republic of Moldova, universities face the challenge of harmonizing curriculum standards with the actual requirements of employers. Thus, the praxiological approach taken in this research aims to diagnose the perception of undergraduate and master's students on hard and soft skills, assess the role of the institution and teaching staff in their training, and identify institutional strategies that can optimize the educational process.

The results indicate a growing awareness of the importance of transversal skills in professional training, with students considering that career success depends equally on technical and interpersonal skills. This balance, also identified in international research, suggests the need for a pedagogical reconfiguration oriented towards experience, project-based learning, and partnership with the socio-economic environment. This study is thus in line with contemporary research on the praxeology of skills, providing an empirical basis for the design of educational and institutional policies aimed at strengthening the training of well-rounded specialists who are competent, reflective, and adaptable to the demands of a constantly changing global economy.

#### *Methodology*

The research is based on a praxiological approach, aimed at correlating the theoretical dimensions of professional skills training with the empirical analysis of the perceptions of undergraduate and master's students at the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (ASEM). The methodological objective was to identify how future economists assess the relevance of hard and soft skills in the university education process and in preparation for professional integration.

The investigation was designed as a descriptive-explanatory study, conducted using a sociological survey with a questionnaire. The research tool, developed on the basis of indicators validated in the literature (World Economic Forum, 2020; Romanenko, 2024; Seattle Jobs Initiative, 2013), focused on five main areas: perception of hard and soft skills, their influence on performance and communication, the role of teachers and institutions in their development, and the perceived level of preparation for the labor market.

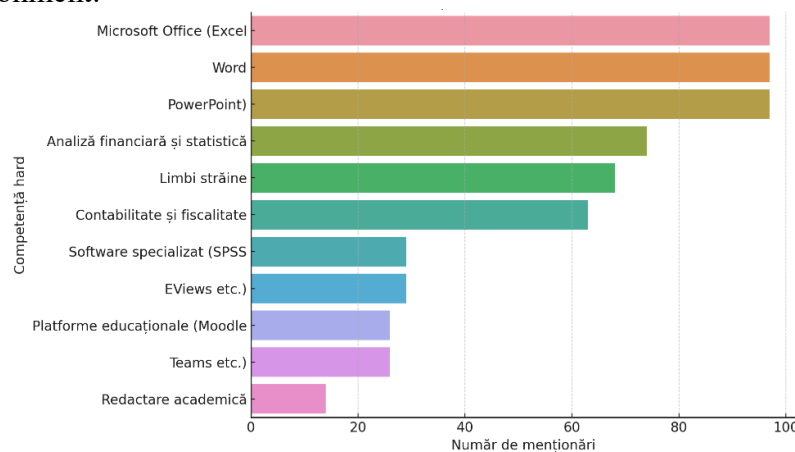
The sample included 114 respondents (undergraduate and master's students in the fields of Finance, Management, Law, Business, and Administration), selected by convenience sampling. The questionnaire, administered online between February and March 2025, combined quantitative items (with multiple-choice answers and Likert scales) and open-ended qualitative questions.

Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistical methods and content analysis of qualitative responses, ensuring triangulation of results. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed by the internal consistency of the responses, and the relevance of the research lies in its practical nature, providing an empirical basis for curriculum adjustment and strengthening the development of professional skills in higher economic education.

#### *2 Praxiological basis for the study of professional skills in higher education*

The overwhelming majority of participants (73.7%) state that they have previously benefited from training activities focused on professional skills development, which indicates a high level of interest and previous exposure to soft/hard skills training. This context suggests that students are aware of the importance of developing these skills and have sought opportunities to do so (both in the university environment and extracurricularly).

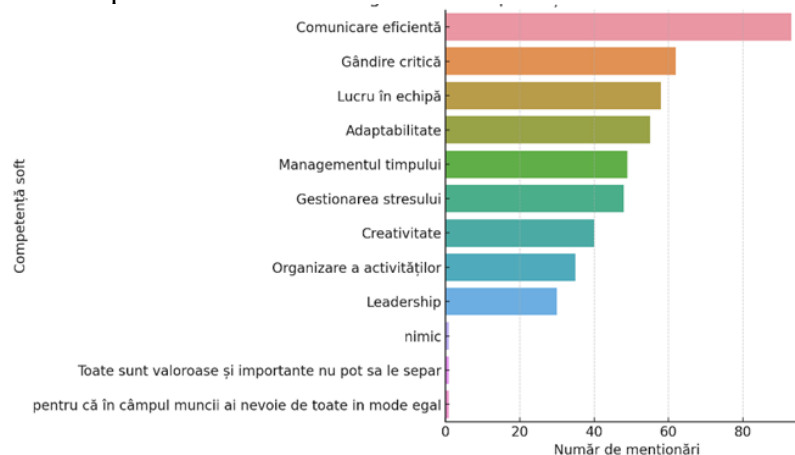
In the context of the research, it is noted that the Microsoft Office package (Excel, Word, PowerPoint) is by far the most frequently mentioned technical skill—approximately 85% of students consider it essential. Next in importance are financial and statistical analysis skills (65%) and knowledge of foreign languages (60%). In addition, more than half of the respondents indicated accounting and taxation skills (55%) as important. In contrast, more specialized hard skills—such as the use of statistical software (SPSS, EViews) or online educational platforms—were mentioned by a smaller percentage (25%–23%), with academic writing (12%) at the bottom of the ranking. These results suggest that students place primary emphasis on basic digital literacy (Office) and fundamental financial and accounting knowledge, considered sine qua non for any economic professional. At the same time, quantitative analysis and foreign language communication skills are perceived as key assets in the labor market, probably reflecting the current requirements of employers in the field to work with data and operate in a globalized environment.



**Figure 1. Hard skills considered most important**

Source: authors own study

It is noteworthy that effective communication is almost unanimously appreciated—82% of students consider it one of the most valuable soft skills. Critical thinking (54%) and teamwork (51%) follow in importance, as well as adaptability (48%). Skills such as time management (43%) and stress management (42%) were also frequently mentioned, suggesting that students are aware of the need to cope effectively with tasks and pressures. Creativity (35%), organizational skills (31%), and leadership (26%) scored slightly lower, but overall, all of these soft skills are considered important.

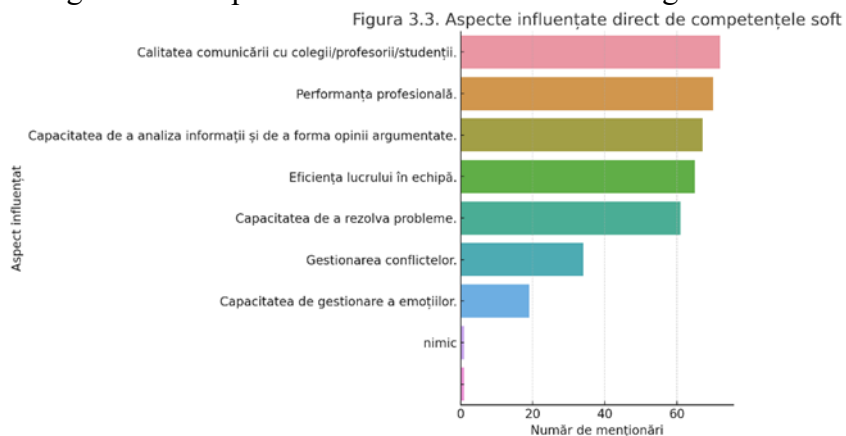


**Figure 2. Soft skills considered most valuable**

Source: authors own study

These perceptions of students largely reflect global trends in the skills required by employers: according to the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs report, skills such as critical thinking, analysis, and problem solving, as well as resilience, stress tolerance, and flexibility, are among the most sought-after skills for 2025. Similarly, studies show that employers increasingly value communication, teamwork, adaptability, and other interpersonal skills, often considering soft skills to be as important as technical skills—if not more important—when hiring candidates. The fact that the students in the sample analysed place effective communication first and frequently mention critical thinking, team spirit and adaptability confirms this alignment with market requirements: they understand that a good specialist excels not only technically, but also in the way they interact, think and adapt.

According to respondents, soft skills have the greatest influence on the quality of communication in academic or professional settings (63% of students believe that soft skills determine how effectively they communicate with colleagues, teachers, clients, etc.). Also, overall professional performance is closely linked to the level of soft skills (as rated by 61% of respondents). The next most important aspects mentioned were the ability to analyze information and form reasoned opinions (59%) and effective teamwork (57%), both of which are direct results of critical thinking and collaboration skills. In addition, more than half (53%) believe that soft skills influence the ability to solve problems at work. Aspects such as conflict management (30%) and managing one's own emotions (17%) were less frequently selected, although these also depend on emotional and social skills. This picture highlights the fact that students realize the major impact of soft skills on everyday professional success—from communication quality and productivity to effective problem solving and a collaborative atmosphere. Therefore, soft skills are perceived as determining factors for performance and harmonious integration into a work team.

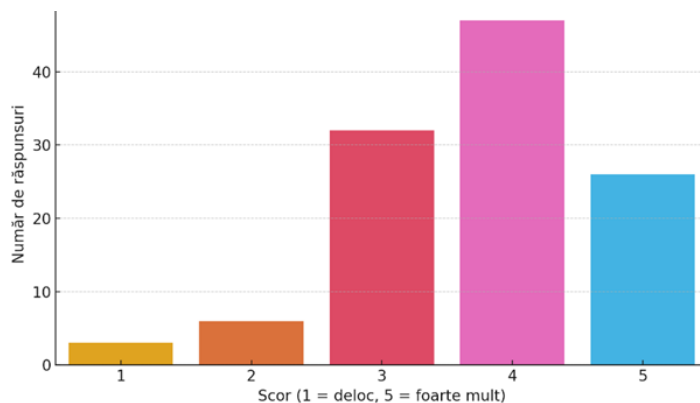


**Figure 3. Aspects directly influenced by soft skills**

Source: authors own study

When asked directly, "Which category of skills has a greater influence on getting a job?", almost three-quarters of respondents (74%) chose the answer "Both equally", suggesting a balanced view: students believe that both hard and soft skills are crucial and complement each other in employment. Only 13% believe that technical (hard) skills are more important, and another 13% indicate soft skills as being decisive. This consensus on the importance of a balance of skills is consistent with the views of employers, over 75% of whom say that soft skills are at least as important as technical skills for new employees. In other words, students are aware that technical skills alone are not enough if they are not complemented by strong interpersonal skills, and vice versa. This awareness is a positive sign, indicating that future graduates are forming realistic expectations about the job market, where there is an increasing demand for "complete", versatile specialists.

Most students evaluate positively the role of the faculty in developing technical skills: about 64% gave a score of 4 or 5, indicating that they consider the academic contribution to be high or very high. The average score is approximately 3.8 out of 5, suggesting a good level of satisfaction with the technical training provided by the study programs. Only a very small number of students ( $\approx 8\%$ , corresponding to categories 1 and 2) consider that the faculty contributes little or not at all to the development of hard skills, while 28% have a moderate opinion (level 3). These data indicate that, overall, the curriculum and university teaching activities largely succeed in providing the necessary hard skills, consolidating students' specialist knowledge. However, there is also a segment of students who feel the need for more—possibly those who expressed lower levels would like an even more practical or in-depth technical approach within the faculty.



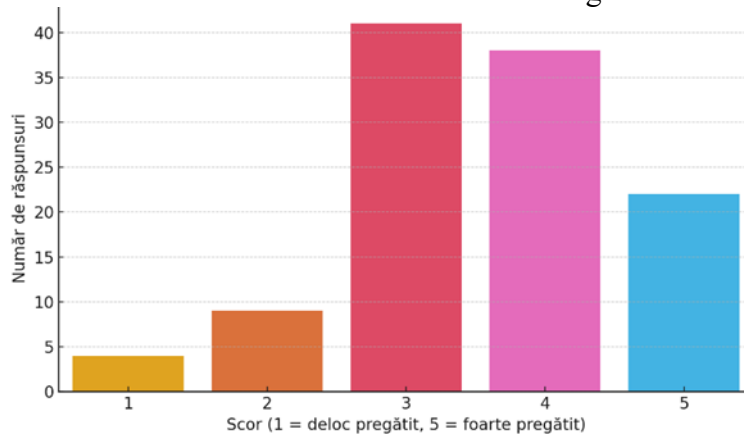
**Figure 4. Perception of the faculty's contribution to the development of hard skills (on a scale from 1 = not at all to 5 = very much).**

Source: authors own study

The results of the research show that 81.5% of students consider that teachers contribute "quite a lot" (52.6%) or "a lot" (28.9%) to the development of their skills (both hard and soft). Approximately 17.5% perceive a small contribution ("a little"), and an insignificant percentage (less than 1%) believe that teachers do not help at all in this regard. This feedback indicates a general appreciation of teachers' efforts: teaching methodologies, guidance, and interaction with teachers are seen as important factors in students' professional training. In practice, most feel that their teachers help them substantially to develop both their knowledge and transversal skills – for example, through group projects (which train teamwork and communication), through critical thinking requirements in seminars, presentations in front of colleagues (which develop communication skills), etc. Of course, there are also students who feel that the contribution is less significant, perhaps pointing to differences in teaching styles; their feedback could suggest that not all teachers place equal emphasis on developing practical skills, which is an area for improvement. Overall, however, the perception is that the role of teachers is essential in shaping professional skills, supporting the conclusion that the university educational process—when interactive and student-centered—favors the development of communication skills, critical thinking, and other relevant soft skills.

When it comes to self-assessment of students' level of preparedness for integration into the labor market in their field of specialization, the distribution of responses is centered on levels 3 and 4: approximately 36% of respondents consider themselves to have an average level of preparedness (score 3), and another 33% assess themselves as having a good level (4). Notably, almost 1 in 5 students (19%) feel "very prepared" (score 5), which shows high confidence in their own abilities among some of the respondents. Only 11% cumulatively consider themselves insufficiently prepared (level 1 or 2). This result, confirmed by data on the contribution of the faculty and teachers, indicates moderate optimism among students regarding their professional

integration: most are confident that they have the knowledge and skills necessary to start a career in the field. The fact that almost 88% say they are at least moderately prepared suggests that study programs and complementary activities are effective in equipping young people with relevant skills. On the other hand, the relatively small percentage of those who feel very prepared probably also indicates caution: many recognise that they still need to gain practical experience and improve certain skills once they actually enter the labour market. This realistic self-assessment is beneficial as it motivates students to continue their professional development after graduation, approaching the transition to their career with a continuous learning attitude.



**Figure 5. Self-assessment of students' level of preparedness for integration into the labor market in their field of specialization (score 1 = not at all prepared, 5 = very prepared).**

Source: authors own study

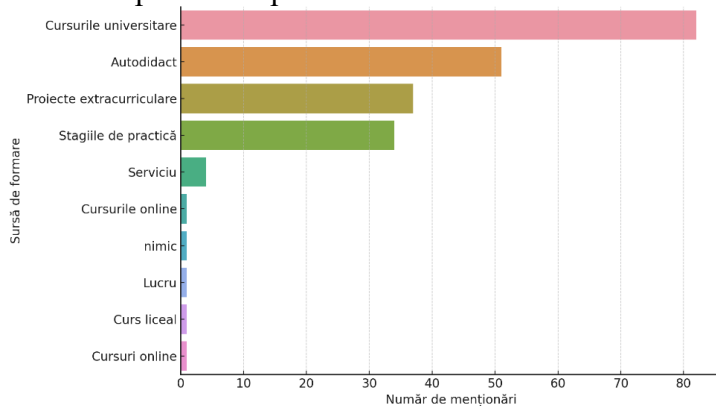
In summary, we note that the diagnosis of ASEM undergraduate and master's students' perceptions shows that: (a) they attach great importance to both fundamental hard skills (IT, financial analysis, foreign languages, accounting) and essential soft skills (communication, critical thinking, teamwork, adaptability); (b) they consider that soft skills have a direct impact on professional performance and integration (especially on communication and efficiency at work); (c) they realise the need for a balance between technical and interpersonal skills in order to obtain a job – the overwhelming majority opting for equal importance of the two categories; (d) appreciate the efforts of the educational institution and teachers in skills training (generally considering their contribution to be substantial); and (e) have a good level of confidence in their professional training, although relatively few consider themselves fully prepared, probably aware of the need to gain practical experience. These contextual elements form the basis for detailed data analysis and the development of improvement strategies, which will be addressed in the following sections.

### **3 Qualitative and quantitative analysis of experimental data**

To deepen the interpretation of the results, in this section we will combine quantitative analysis of the data obtained (frequency distributions, observational correlations between variables) with qualitative analysis of the open-ended responses provided by students. The aim is to identify both general trends and the nuances and explanations behind the figures, provided by the respondents' own perceptions and suggestions.

*Sources of hard skills training.* The first aspect analyzed was how students actually acquired their hard skills. The responses indicate a variety of learning sources, both formal and informal. We note that university courses are by far the main source: 72% of students attribute the role of training technical skills (theoretical and practical) to the university – a result that is not surprising, given that higher education programs have the explicit objective of providing specialized knowledge. In second place, however, is the self-taught effort of students: almost 45% say they have developed their hard skills through individual study, self-practice, or other forms of

independent learning. This significant percentage highlights the personal initiative of many young people to supplement their knowledge. The next most important sources are extracurricular projects (32%) and internships (30%). These reveal that one third of students had the opportunity to develop their technical skills through practical experiences outside of class hours – such as involvement in student organizations, competitions, volunteer projects with a professional component, or mandatory internships in companies. Very few indicated employment (an actual job) as the main source of hard skills (3.5%), suggesting that most have not yet worked enough in the field or do not attribute a major role to employment in the development of technical skills at this time. Also, online courses were mentioned only in isolated cases (2%), a sign that the current generation of students still prefers traditional sources (university, books) or learning by doing, with online platforms not being a popular option or perhaps not yet sufficiently known among them for the development of specific economic skills.



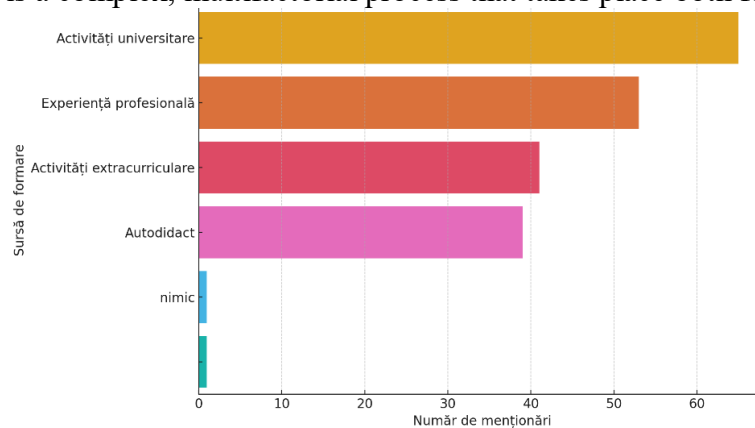
**Figure 6. Main sources through which students developed their hard skills (percentage of respondents who selected each option).**

Source: authors own study

Interpreting these results, we can conclude that the university remains the central pillar in the development of hard skills, but it does not act alone: students often supplement their training through their own efforts and extra-academic practice. This may reflect two complementary realities: on the one hand, the academic curriculum provides a solid theoretical foundation (which young people consider to be the main source of learning), and on the other hand, the labor market and technological developments encourage students to seek additional knowledge and keep up with new tools, resorting to self-training and practical projects. We therefore see a mutual complementarity between formal and informal education: where the standard curriculum does not go into sufficient depth on a particular skill, or when students feel the need to apply the theory they have learned in practice, they resort to internships, workshops, or self-study. This also suggests areas for improvement—for example, the university could capitalize on this desire for self-learning by integrating more online resources into the teaching process or by facilitating student participation in real-world projects.

*How soft skills are acquired.* A similar question concerned the origin of the soft skills that students have developed to date (respondents could choose up to two significant options). The results offer an interesting perspective on the factors that contribute to the development of interpersonal and professional conduct skills. Most often, students attribute a decisive role to activities during college (courses, seminars, team projects within disciplines) – 57% indicate the university environment as a catalyst for the development of their soft skills. This highlights that, beyond theoretical knowledge, college provides contexts for interaction (teamwork, oral presentations, classroom debates) that help young people practice communication, collaboration, and critical thinking. In second place, however, direct professional experience (work or internship) was mentioned by almost 47% of students as a source of soft skills. In other words, almost half of

the respondents feel that they have learned to relate, work efficiently, and adapt through work experience, whether temporary or part-time. This significant percentage suggests that many students have already had contact with the labor market (through internships or entry-level jobs) and have thus acquired skills such as professional communication, working under pressure, and solving practical problems—skills that are difficult to fully simulate in an academic environment. The next most important sources are extracurricular activities (indicated by 36% of respondents) – such as volunteering, participation in student organizations, student projects and competitions – and self-training/personal education (34%). These highlight that over a third of students attribute their soft skills to their involvement outside the classroom (where they have the opportunity to take on roles, interact with different groups, organize events, thus developing their leadership, responsibility, and emotional intelligence), but also to reading, training, or personal reflection. Almost no one answered "nothing" to this question, which indicates that all students identify at least one significant source that has shaped their soft skills—a sign that the development of these skills is a complex, multifactorial process that takes place both formally and informally.



**Figure 7. Main ways of developing soft skills, as self-reported by students (percentage of total respondents).**

Source: authors own study

Comparing the sources of training for hard and soft skills, several observations can be made: (1) Formal university education is essential for both categories of skills, but its relative role is perceived as more significant in the development of technical skills. For soft skills, although university remains the main environment, the weight of other factors (work experience, extracurricular activities) is greater than in the case of hard skills. This makes sense, as interpersonal and attitudinal skills are manifested and honed in various life situations, not just in the classroom. (2) Practical experience (through work or internships) contributes much more significantly to the development of soft skills than to that of hard skills. While relatively few students learned technical knowledge directly on the job, almost half cultivated soft skills through work. This confirms that the real work environment offers opportunities for socializing, organizing, and solving problems as a team, which are crucial for developing soft skills, while hard skills are often consolidated before employment, in the academic environment. (3) Self-development plays an important role in both cases – students complementing their studies both to deepen technical skills and to improve personal skills. This appetite for individual learning suggests that students who continue to be proactive will have an advantage in accumulating the skills required by the market.

*Analysis of qualitative responses and suggestions from respondents.* The questionnaire also included open-ended questions, allowing undergraduate and graduate students to provide comments, suggestions, and personal views on professional skills training. Qualitative analysis of these responses reveals several recurring themes, which we will discuss below.

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A first important theme is the need to increase the practical and applied nature of training. Many students emphasized that they would like to see more practical activities integrated into their university studies. For example, one respondent suggested introducing "project-based learning, case studies and simulations, relevant internships, mentoring and coaching, interactive workshops on specific skills." Others explicitly mentioned the need for workshops focused on soft skills, practical communication sessions, or "more practical projects, internships [and] workshops on soft skills, simulations." The organization of events by students (such as the project simulating the organization of a conference or business event in the third year) was also mentioned, considered very useful for practicing communication, leadership, time management, and other skills. These proposals indicate that students want concrete opportunities to apply theory in practice and to train their skills in a controlled environment before entering the labor market. This trend is in line with modern trends in higher education, which promote experiential methods—such as problem-based learning, project-based learning, or role-playing—for the development of transversal skills. The implementation of such methods could be very beneficial, given that the students themselves are requesting them.

The second theme mentioned is openness to the external environment and real professional practice. Numerous qualitative responses recommend strengthening links with industry and the business environment: "meetings with specialists in the field" and "visits to companies" are some concrete examples provided by respondents. Such activities would allow students to directly understand employers' expectations and how to apply their skills in real work situations. Many also mentioned the importance of well-structured internships. Although internships are generally part of the curriculum, students' suggestions imply a desire for these internships to be extended or diversified, possibly coupled with mentoring. The involvement of practitioners and mentors from industry in student training can facilitate the transfer of up-to-date know-how and the development of industry-specific skills, increasing the relevance of academic training to the requirements of the labor market.

A third direction emerging from the analysis is the emphasis on targeted training in certain specific skills that are perceived as lacking. A few examples: a group of students suggests dedicated courses on "Microsoft Office Management" (a sign that, although most of them know the basics, they would like an advanced level, more focused on solving concrete economic tasks with Excel, for example). Others mention the need to introduce courses in "Risk Management" or workshops in "Academic Writing" – skills that are very useful in the economic and academic fields, but which may not be sufficiently covered at present. These specific requirements show that students are realistically assessing their gaps and requesting institutional support to correct them, in the form of dedicated courses or training. A similar direction is the integration of emerging digital technologies: one respondent describes the ideal profile of the modern specialist as "a specialist who can use digital tools and artificial intelligence in their daily tasks, combining them with critical and analytical thinking." This suggests that students are aware of the importance of advanced digital skills (data analysis, use of AI) and would likely be receptive to courses or workshops in these areas, which represents an opportunity for academia to update its educational offerings.

A fourth theme observed in the open-ended responses is flexibility and diversification of the educational path. Suggestions such as "freedom of choice" or "more options for volunteer and academic projects" indicate students' desire for more autonomy in choosing how to develop their skills. They would probably like the opportunity to choose skills-oriented elective courses (e.g., an elective course in Public Speaking or Leadership) or the opportunity to replace certain theoretical disciplines with equivalent credited practical activities. This need for flexibility reflects the diversity of students' interests and needs—some may want to develop their entrepreneurial skills, others their digital skills, and others their social skills—and suggests that a more modular curriculum framework could better respond to these individual aspirations.

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Based on the entire set of data—quantitative and qualitative—the *ideal portrait of the young specialist emerges*, along with certain discrepancies between expectations and reality. Respondents describe the ideal profile of a modern economic specialist in words such as "open to knowledge and challenges, in continuous development," "adaptable, analytical, solution-oriented, with strategic vision, responsible, and honest." This profile combines character traits and soft skills (openness to new ideas, adaptability, team spirit, integrity, leadership, effective communication) with a high level of hard skills (up-to-date knowledge in the field, use of digital tools and artificial intelligence, solid analytical thinking). In practice, students imagine a "complete", multifaceted professional, which once again confirms the premise that both categories of skills are indispensable. At the same time, they feel that in order to achieve this ideal, higher education institutions must adopt concrete measures (such as those discussed above) to enhance the development of these skills. All these insights will form the basis for the development of proposed institutional strategies designed to address the needs identified and to harmonise the educational process with the profile of the ideal graduate and the requirements of the current labour market.

**Institutional strategies for developing the soft and hard skills of undergraduate and master's students.** Based on the results obtained, it is necessary to formulate strategies and recommendations for the Academy of Economic Studies and, by extension, for higher education institutions in economics, aimed at improving the development of students' soft and hard skills. The purpose of these strategies is to capitalize on the strengths identified (e.g., the already significant contribution of teachers to skills training, students' interest in self-learning) and to remedy areas for improvement (such as the perceived lack of practical components or the limited offer of courses focused on transversal skills). The main recommended strategic directions are presented below:

*Systematic integration of learning through practice and projects.* A priority would be for the faculty to increase the proportion of experiential methods in the teaching process. It is recommended that each specialisation introduce courses or modules based on real projects, case studies, business simulations and role-playing games. Such problem-based and project-based learning approaches have proven effective in developing technical skills as well as collaboration, leadership and critical thinking skills. In addition, the university could organize simulations of professional situations (e.g., simulation games of business negotiations, management meetings, financial crisis resolution) to provide students with a safe space to practice their skills. Increasing the practical component does not mean diminishing the theoretical one, but rather complementing it: academic knowledge will be more firmly established if students have the immediate opportunity to apply it. Also, the practical feedback received during these activities will help them become aware of their skill gaps and correct them before graduation.

*Expanding and diversifying internships and partnerships with the socio-economic environment.* Given the clear benefits of work experience in skills development (especially soft skills), it is essential that the faculty strengthen its links with companies, public institutions, and NGOs to provide students with more internship opportunities. It is recommended to develop an extensive internship program (including optional, paid, flexible-term internships) in the students' fields of specialization. At the same time, study visits to companies and meetings/debates with professionals from different sectors could be organized periodically (e.g., inviting a top manager to talk about the importance of communication and leadership skills in their organization). Such direct interactions with the professional environment help students calibrate their expectations and better understand professional standards and culture. Another important aspect is the involvement of employers in the educational process—for example, inviting practitioners as speakers or co-mentors in applied disciplines, or consulting companies when updating the curriculum (to include the most sought-after skills). Through such partnerships, the faculty also fulfills its role as a bridge to the labor market, facilitating the transition of graduates and increasing their employability.

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*Introduction of specific training modules for soft skills.* Given the importance of soft skills highlighted by both students and employers, it is recommended that courses dedicated to developing these skills be created. One strategy would be to implement a module of cross-disciplinary subjects (possibly optional, but encouraged, or even compulsory) focused on: communication and public speaking, teamwork and leadership, critical thinking and problem solving, emotional intelligence and stress management, professional ethics and integrity, time management and personal productivity, etc. An example of good practice comes from ITMO University, where soft skills are taught in a separate block of compulsory subjects available to students. ASEM could implement a similar model, adapted to the local context, which would ensure that all students receive systematic training in these areas. These courses should be highly interactive—based on exercises, simulations, team games—different from traditional courses, in order to provide a framework for practical skills training. The inclusion of regular soft skills workshops in the curriculum (e.g., a public speaking workshop with an external trainer, or a creative problem-solving hackathon) would complement this approach.

*Updating and making the curriculum more flexible.* In light of students' suggestions regarding "freedom of choice" and the need to be able to deepen skills of interest, a curriculum review is recommended in order to increase flexibility. In addition, certain existing disciplines could be reconfigured to incorporate practical components/soft skills—for example, a management course could include a leadership module with practical exercises; a specialized foreign language course could also focus on intercultural communication in business; an economic informatics course could integrate workshops on creative problem solving with the help of technology. At the same time, students could be given the opportunity to choose between a practical project or a theoretical paper at the end of a course, depending on their interests (for example, in a Human Resources course: either writing an academic essay or designing a practical employee training plan – at the student's choice). Such measures would give students a greater say in their own education, which would increase their motivation and help them to develop the skills they consider relevant to their careers more intensively.

*Continuous development of teaching staff and pedagogical methods.* Last but not least, the success of implementing these strategies depends on the preparation and openness of teachers. It is important for ASEM to invest in training programs for teachers—training on competency-based teaching, the use of modern educational technologies, methods for assessing soft skills, etc. For example, teachers could take short courses on experiential learning, educational coaching, or integrating serious games into teaching. In addition, it would be useful to create an organizational culture oriented towards teaching innovation, in which teachers exchange good practices and are encouraged to experiment with new approaches in the classroom. Student feedback ("disciplining teachers in class") suggests that some students want more rigorous and engaging teaching, which implies the need for all teachers to maintain a high level of professionalism, punctuality, interactivity, and content updating. A teacher who is well trained in pedagogy and connected to current requirements will be able to insert teaching moments for soft skills even in technical courses, cultivating the right attitudes in students in addition to knowledge. Thus, investment in teacher training has a direct multiplier effect on student training.

By implementing these strategies—hands-on learning, industry partnerships, soft skills modules, mentoring, flexible curriculum, and professional development for teachers—the Academy of Economic Studies can consolidate its role in training graduates with a comprehensive skill set, adapted to the demands of the 21st century. Students will benefit from a more relevant educational experience, where they will learn by doing, pursue their professional passions, and cultivate both their analytical minds and social skills. At the same time, employers will encounter better-prepared graduates – with solid technical foundations, but also with the ability to communicate, work in teams, adapt, and innovate. This creates a virtuous circle: competent

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graduates who easily integrate into the labor market and perform well, which enhances the reputation of the institution and the attractiveness of its programs. In conclusion, the integrated development of soft and hard skills should not be viewed as a secondary objective, but as a core mission of the modern university, since "success in the workplace requires more than technical skills... soft skills are what make the difference" in training a successful professional. Implementing the above recommendations will bring the educational process closer to this vision, preparing versatile, innovative graduates who are ready to face the complex challenges of the contemporary economy.

The praxiological analysis carried out in this chapter reveals a complex and relevant picture of how undergraduate and master's students perceive and use professional skills in the academic context and in relation to labor market requirements. The data obtained confirm that the university education process plays a significant role in the development of hard skills, but the development of soft skills remains largely dependent on extracurricular contexts and personal initiatives. This disjunction between the two categories of skills suggests the need for an integrative and interdisciplinary approach, in which organizational communication, understood not only as the transmission of information but also as a vector for personal training and development, becomes a strategic element. This chapter highlights the importance of adapting institutional professional training strategies so that they reflect the contemporary demands of the labor market in a balanced way and intentionally and systematically cultivate the skills that define the modern economic specialist.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis of the results obtained in the praxiological research confirms that students and master's students at the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova have a complex and realistic understanding of the relationship between skills development and professional success. They recognize the value of both categories of skills—hard and soft—but believe that interpersonal, communication, and adaptability skills play a decisive role in organizational performance and effective integration into work teams. This perception highlights a shift in focus from strictly technical knowledge to socio-communicative skills, reflecting global trends in the profile of the modern professional.

In terms of hard skills, the results show a pronounced orientation towards digitization and the use of technological tools in economic activity. Digital literacy, financial analysis, and data processing skills are perceived as indispensable elements of professional training. This preference shows how students are adapting to the demands of today's market, where digital and analytical skills are key to efficiency and innovation.

On the other hand, soft skills—especially effective communication, critical thinking, responsibility, and team spirit—are valued as decisive factors for performance in organizational environments. They are associated with the ability to relate, collaborate, and be professionally resilient, highlighting a high degree of responsiveness to employers' requirements and a mature understanding of the role of human interaction in economic success.

The assessment of the role of higher education institutions reveals a predominantly moderate perception of their contribution to the development of professional skills. The average scores (between 3 and 4 on a scale of 1 to 5) indicate significant but improvable involvement in the development of students' skills. This suggests the need for curricular and methodological adjustments aimed at increasing the proportion of applied activities and educational partnerships with the professional environment.

The sources of skills development are varied, confirming the hybrid nature of the contemporary educational process. While hard skills are mainly acquired through formal education—courses, internships, university projects—soft skills derive mainly from extracurricular experiences and informal contexts. This observation highlights the need for

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universities to systematically integrate the non-formal dimension into the learning process in order to ensure a balanced and coherent development of skills.

Although most students consider themselves well or very well prepared for professional integration, the level of confidence varies between specializations and stages of training. This unevenness reflects differences between disciplines, curricular structures, and the degree of individual involvement in complementary activities, which underscores the importance of personalized approaches in university education.

Finally, the ideal profile of the modern specialist, as outlined by respondents, illustrates the vision of a versatile professional—able to combine solid technical skills with interpersonal and adaptability skills. This model integrates analytical competence, critical thinking, strategic communication, and social responsibility, defining a graduate prepared to perform in a dynamic and globalized economic environment. The research thus demonstrates that professional success in the 21st century requires an organic interdependence between hard and soft skills, and that university education must reflect this complementarity in an explicit and operational manner.

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