

# COMPETENCY GAP: MANAGERS' EXPECTATIONS AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SOFT SKILLS

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**COMPETENCY GAP:  
MANAGERS' EXPECTATIONS AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE  
IMPORTANCE OF SOFT SKILLS**

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**ABSTRACT**

It has often been stated that soft skills competencies are crucial for hospitality graduates entering modern business world. It becomes clear that various interests in the market of job-related skills have been created between different stakeholders: industry, educators and students. The previous research has already identified a gap between the perceptions of hospitality students when it comes to importance of soft skills opposed to their level of preparedness. The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a gap between hospitality students perceptions of which soft skills are important for their future careers and whether their college curriculum and co-op prepared them to be competent in these skills. The results obtained proved that there is a gap between the importance and the level of preparedness, since the importance of soft skills was rated higher than students' level of preparedness. There were also significant differences between genders when it comes to importance, while preparedness was evaluated differently when looking upon graduate levels. The results of the paper show that the future of competence building process for hospitality students and employees in hospitality industry should include building of all three categories: knowledge, attitude and skills for students and employees in hospitality.

**KEY WORDS:** soft skills, preparedness, hospitality students, communication, leadership, teamwork, time-management, problem-solving skills

## INTRODUCTION

Hospitality industry has been undergoing a fundamental transformation. Forged by growing complexity of the contemporary world, technological advancements, increased connectivity and globalization, this transformation in such a way has given place to a highly competitive business environment. Considering that no industry is immune to this trend it is also possible to say that the change is critical to survival and growth (Kim, Tavitiyaman & Kim, 2009, p.369)

### **Progression of Value**

According to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) the value is shifting from product-centric to customer-centric, and it is also noted that business to customer approach outbalanced the business to business approach. As Clark-Fischer hypothesis argues, when the majority of the workforce becomes over-productive in one sector, the economy moves to the next one. (Regan, 1963) This can be further confirmed by the progression of value suggested by Pine & Gilmore (1998), who state that the value progresses by the process of extracting commodities, transforming commodities into goods, goods being delivered as a service and finally delivered service provide a unique experience to customer. In such a way, the progression leads to another stage called rendering the authenticity of staged experiences, which means providing integrity, passion, creativity and excellence to customers (Pine, Gilmore, 1998).

### **Job Market Changes**

Hospitality industry as one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in the world is highly responsive to changes brought by the complexity of contemporary world and technological advancements. The transformation of business and highly competitive business environment

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have created the need for significant changes of the job market and required skills. Companies are forced to conform to these trends and customer demands in order to survive on the market.

This is why the best companies in hospitality industry are those who followed trends by becoming customer centric and offering products combined of high-tech and high-touch.

On the other hand, these changes have a negative impact on the job market by making many of professions redundant due to advancements in technology. As the result many companies had to replace their strategies and adjust their business performance to satisfy the market demand. There is a significant need for companies re-educating and improving employee's skills due to shortages on the market (Palmer, 2017).

It is therefore certain that the need for developing qualitative human capital in the workplace as well as increased education of individuals for a wide range of skills are both required to cope with business complexity. The above mentioned changes have created the "demand for stronger and more continuous connections between education and employment"(Palmer, 2017).

### **Changing Role of Consumer**

Many of these profound changes are caused by the advancements in technology, especially on the Internet which has given a dramatic flavor to the new world. The complexity of technological advancements has influenced the complexity of consumers' demands, but at the same time, the role of consumers has changed significantly by the ever-changing influence of the information access and networking.

In order to satisfy ever-demanding customers it has become crucial to investigate customers' demands and then work backwards to technology. However, endowing customers with authority in co-creating the value is still seen as a prerequisite for consistent and efficient service (Prahalad, Ramaswamy, 2004).

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On the other hand, there is a limited need for hard skills that are still important in modern economy. The key to success in transformed business environment is to include soft skills or so called people skills which cannot be easily replaced by technology. Moreover, improving observational skills, innovation and thinking outside the box is crucial to create authentic experiences (Prahalad & Krishnan, 2008).

### **The Importance of Skills in Education**

With all of these before mentioned changes, skills framework has to be incorporated in every hospitality management curriculum in order to meet both industry and student expectations. There has been no significant change in hospitality industry education since its inception in the 1920s, but the shift to the new economy and modern market has created the need for implementing changes in educational programs to meet industry demands. The intersection of interests was created between industry, educators and students in the current market of workplace skills (Raybould, Hugh, 2006). It is also clear that the ever-changing world of hospitality will also create more specific demands related to the specific needs of the market.

### **RIT Croatia Dubrovnik**

RIT Croatia in Dubrovnik is a global campus of Rochester Institute of Technology, a private research university in Rochester, New York. The Dubrovnik campus was founded in 1997, and offers 4-year undergraduate degrees in International Hospitality and Service Management (recently changed to Hospitality and Service Management or HSM) and Information Technology. While the student body is primarily local (from Croatia and neighbouring countries), the American curriculum (provided by RIT in Rochester) is taught entirely in English. Students receive both Croatian and American diplomas upon graduation, recognized by the Croatian Ministry of Education, European nations according to the Bologna agreement, and American institutions.

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Professor-student relationships, academic policies, extra-curricular activities and classroom activities are, in general, based on American educational cultural norms and traditions. HSM is a multidisciplinary program which provides an idea of balance of “hands-on” experience and practical knowledge of the areas of economy, tourism and hospitality. The main emphasis is put on marketing, communication, finances, hospitality management, hotel management, micro and macroeconomics, entrepreneurship, and the application of these areas to international hospitality and tourism. Students are required to complete 1,200 hours of cooperative education or internship placements. These working experiences provide students with a valuable professional experience and give them a competitive advantage in launching their careers. Students work for local and international renowned companies learning about service management from the best. US based hospitality organizations often recruit our students for international coops.

### **What is a Skill?**

As Remedios (2012) suggests, a skill is a learned ability used to accomplish a set of actions with minimum time and effort. According to the same author, skills can be subdivided into two groups, domain-general and domain-specific skills. Domain-general skills are necessary in any aspect of human performance; therefore, they are required to meet the increasing demands of the current job market. For example, domain-general skills include teamwork, leadership, time-management and self-motivation. Domain-specific skills are required in certain fields of study, for example design engineering and research and development. The fluctuation in business complexity has influenced many other changes in this area and, consequently, several skills have become more significant and commonly classified as “soft” and “hard” skills

### **Soft Skills**

The term *soft skill* was first introduced in 1972, but it became widely used in 1990s due to changing needs of industries. The increasing level of competition and business complexity caused the shift in focus from basic skills to effective and efficient soft skills. Perreault (2006, p.125) defines soft skills as “those traits and capabilities that an individual possesses in addition to the individual’s technical and/or knowledge skillset”. Technical knowledge and/or skillset refer to hard skills which are required for specific tasks or situations and are considered to be difficult to acquire. Even though there must be an equal weight given to both set of skills, hard skills are often considered as complimentary to soft skills.

According to this division soft skills refer to “collection of skills and abilities related to the execution of a job, such as communication skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills, teamwork skills, time-management skills, negotiation skills, motivation skills, writing skills, problem solving skills, and decision making skills” (Remedios, 2012).

The two conventional methods can be used for acquiring or improving soft skills which are formal training and self-training through books or e-learning. According to Mitchell et al. (2010) soft skills can be perceived as the level of commitment of an individual compared to other individuals with the similar level of competencies. “Within the retailing and hospitality industry, soft skills can be the considered as behaviors which directly impact customer/guest impressions and their feelings, and they can cause positive, negative or indifferent reactions” (Nedry, 2016).



## **Soft Skills in Hospitality Industry**

As Boyatzis (1982) and Stevens and Campion (1994) argue there are five categories of soft skills important for workplace success:

1. *Leadership skills*: Leadership is a skill of coping with change, sensing situations, communicating with care and resolving conflicts. It is ideal for dealing with others, providing service to clients and participating in teamwork (Kantrowitz, 2005). Implementing leadership training is vital for the improvement of students' soft skills (Wesley et al., 2016). Leaders need authority, energy, clear vision and a strategic direction to engage people and rouse their commitment to a certain company goal. Moreover, leadership skills are important for delegating tasks and responsibilities. In order to be authentic and effective leaders must reveal their weaknesses to create trust and establish collaborative atmosphere in their teams. Moreover, leaders should be able to sense situations and observe signals from the environment in order to adjust their actions and lead teams effectively. However, leaders must give people what they need, not what they want by daring to be different, communicating with care and conforming enough. Finally, "leaders must excel at inspiring people, capturing hearts, minds and souls (Goffee, Jones, 2006).
2. *Communication skills*: Language is known as the primary implementation tool and it has to be governed by four attributes in order to be effective; those elements are *clarity, stimulation, congruency* and *respect*. Communication has to be clear in delivering the purpose; it also has to be stimulating in the way of delivering message in a powerful, inspiring, dramatic and congruent ways. Finally, the most important factor of communication is being respectful to others. Listening, verbal communication and non-verbal communication seem to be most vital competencies employers require from employees (Graham et al., 2009).

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Listening is the ability to receive and interpret messages in the process of communication; therefore it is considered to be crucial for effective communication. Verbal communication is the most common type of communication because it involves understanding the needs and desires of customers in order to provide them the service quality demanded through the process of information sharing. On the contrary, non-verbal communication includes intentional and unintentional exchange of information between speakers by sending and receiving wordless cues such as body language, distance and physical appearance.

3. *Teamwork skills*: According to Kantrowitz (2005) teamwork skills often include “the ability to articulate goals, organize people and resources, and monitor progress in order to resolve problems”. It is important to find people with mandatory team skills, which will improve productivity, creativity, decision-making of the company as well as allow improving leadership and communication skills by helping the teams’ members grow (Hartenian, 2003). In hospitality industry teamwork is the crucial factor for synergy and effective flow between the hotel departments.
4. *Problem-solving skills*: These skills refer to “identifying and analyzing problems, taking effective and appropriate actions, and realizing the effect of decisions” (Crawford et al., 2011). Problem solving skills are no longer an exclusive responsibility, thus every employee should undertake the duty and responsibility of solving problems. Problem-solving culture depends on how well people work together to solve problems, helping to build trust, and finding out what people do well and encouraging innovation and measuring risks (Marone, Blauthn.d.).
5. *Time-management skills*: these skills are described as managing time to ensure productivity, handling with customers’ demands, making fast decisions as well as spending time on crucial issues rather than less urgent situations.

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These skills are extremely important for revenue optimization because of the time-perishable nature of services. Effective time-management ensures making fast decisions and quick response to customers' demands which in most cases includes self-management and problem-solving skills (Ruetzler et al., 2014).

### **Soft Skills in the College Curriculum**

Today's world is a world of business transformation where identifying and developing important competencies is crucial for coping with change and ever-growing customer demands. This is why identifying and developing important competencies is required of graduates and it should be incorporated in curriculum by their educators (Hodges, Burchell, 2003.) Even though some employers have already recognized the importance of soft skills there is a need to point out the increasing emphasis on soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, communication, personality and other personal traits are considered to be crucial for success in the uncertain job market (Hodges, Burchell, 2003).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate what is the competency gap between the perceptions of hospitality students of which soft skills are important and whether their college curriculum and working over co-op prepared them to competently use those skills in their workplaces. Moreover, this paper will determine if there were significant differences in the perceptions of hospitality students in the soft skills importance compared to their perceived level of preparedness both in-class and during their period of cooperative education, which is mandatory part of their education. In order to identify the competency gap between importance and preparedness this study will seek to determine "What competencies hospitality students consider to be important?" as opposed to "How competent graduates are when they first enter the workplace?"

## METHOD

### Purpose

In order to examine hospitality student' views on the importance of soft skills opposed to their in-class and co-op level of soft skills preparedness, the following research questions were posed:

1. What soft skills hospitality students consider important for success in hospitality industry?
2. Are there significant differences in hospitality students' perceptions of the soft skills important for success and their perceptions of their level of in-class or co-op preparedness in soft skills upon graduation?

Out of the 100 possible participants, there were two individuals that haven't had co-op or any work experience; therefore, 98 % responses were used as sample.

The above research has identified the following four hypotheses for this paper:

*H1*: There is a significant difference between hospitality students' perceptions of importance and in-class preparedness of the soft skills.

*H2*: There is a significant difference between hospitality students' perceptions of their level of in-class and co-op preparedness of soft skills.

*H3*: There is a significant difference between male and female students' perceptions when it comes to soft skills importance and level of preparedness.

*H4*: There is a significant difference between hospitality students' perceptions when it comes to different year levels.

### **Instrument**

In order to collect the information relevant for this research a survey was chosen as the most appropriate form of data collection and it has been distributed in English language. Questions were adopted from the survey previously used by Lolli (2011): The survey measures entry-level hospitality leaders' perceptions on which interpersonal communication skills are important to success and whether college curricula have prepared them to be competent interpersonal communicators. Minor changes were made to reflect this study's focus on five main soft skills categories rather than only interpersonal communication skills, since quantitative data was needed to describe the perceptions of hospitality students on: what soft skills are important opposed to their level of in-class and co-op preparedness, a cross-sectional design was deemed to be appropriate.

The survey begins with a cover letter briefly explaining the purpose and significance of the research. The main instrument consists of three soft skills categories:

1. Soft skills importance: communication skills ( $\alpha=.82$ ), leadership skills importance ( $\alpha=0.71$ ), teamwork skills importance ( $\alpha=0.80$ ), time-management skills importance ( $\alpha=0.76$ ), problem-solving skills importance ( $\alpha=0.80$ )
2. Soft skills in-class preparedness: communication skills ( $\alpha=0.75$ ), leadership skills ( $\alpha=0.70$ ), teamwork skills ( $\alpha=0.80$ ), time-management skills ( $\alpha=0.82$ ), problem-solving skills in-class preparedness ( $\alpha=0.82$ )
3. Soft skills co-op preparedness: communication skills ( $\alpha=0.80$ ), leadership skills ( $\alpha=0.73$ ), teamwork skills ( $\alpha=.73$ ), time-management skills ( $\alpha=0.74$ ), and problem-solving skills ( $\alpha=0.83$ )

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Each category contains four statements each being measured on a 5-point Likert scale. To answer posed research questions, there are three dimensions of the survey: 1) importance, 2) in-class preparedness and 3) co-op preparedness. In the first dimension, importance, participants responded to the questions based on a 5-point Likert scale (1-not at all important, 2- slightly important, 3=somewhat important, 4- moderately important, 5-extremely important). In this dimension, participants rated their perception of the importance of five main soft skills categories: communication, leadership, teamwork, time-management and problem-solving. In the second and third dimension, in-class preparedness and co-op preparedness, questions were also based on a 5-point Likert scale (1-poorly prepared, 2- slightly prepared, 3-somewhat prepared, 4- moderately prepared, 5-very well prepared), where hospitality students rated their perception of their college curriculum or co-op experience prepared them for future careers.

The second part of the survey was demographic and open-ended questions. In the demographic questions participants were asked about their gender, school degree and graduate levels, while in the open-ended questions students were asked to write down the top three most essential skills for their future career, as well as top three courses that helped them to prepare for the future jobs. The final question was point allocation where participants were asked to rank the main five soft skills from 1 to 5 (1 being most important, 5 being least important).

### **Participants**

The participants in the survey were RIT Croatia (Rochester Institute of Technology) students from the HSM program in Dubrovnik, who are familiar with hospitality industry demands and the importance of soft skills for their future careers. The survey was distributed only to the hospitality service management major students of which 15% freshman, 23% sophomore, 35% junior and 27% senior students, also 54% being female, 45 % male and 1% other.

### **Procedure**

Data collected from students was analyzed by using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) in few steps. First, descriptive statistics was used to show the profile of the respondents. Secondly, reliability analysis was used to measure if the questions were reliable ( $\text{Alpha } \alpha > 0.70$ ). Thirdly, correlations analysis was used to see if there was a correlation between the main three dimensions of importance vs. in-class and co-op preparedness. T-test analysis was used to compare means of each statement in order to find the gap between the importance and preparedness dimensions. Finally, the on-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze each skills requirement a compared means of students at different year levels as well as gender.

## RESULTS

### Soft skills importance descriptive

In order to examine the perceptions of hospitality students on the importance and preparedness of soft skills means were calculated for the entire survey. In the first category measuring the importance of communication skills there were four statements, “listening with understanding” statements was rated as highly important ( $M=4.63$ ,  $SD=.74$ ) while “using the appropriate tone of voice” was rated as the least important ( $M=4.23$ ,  $SD= 1.00$ ) (Figure 1).

In the second category, measuring the importance of leadership skills, statement “being open to changes” as the most important one ( $M=4.50$ ,  $SD=.87$ ) while “knowing basic theories of leadership” was rated at least important statement ( $M=4.06$ ,  $SD=1.16$ ) (Figure 2).

In the third category, measuring the importance of teamwork skills, “accepting individual differences among group members” was rated highest ( $M=4.45$ ,  $SD=.73$ ), while “contributing to the common goal” was rated lowest ( $M=4.29$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ) (Figure 3).

In the fourth category, measuring the importance of time-management skills, students rated “having fast reaction when the problem occurs” as the most important skill ( $M=4.45$ ,  $SD=.78$ ) while “meeting deadlines without rushing at last minute” was rated as least important ( $M=4.17$ ,  $SD=.90$ ) (Figure 4).

In the final category of importance students rated problem-solving skills, where the statement “choosing the best alternative to solve the problem” was the most important ( $M=4.42$ ,  $SD=.82$ ) while the statement “defining problem carefully before solving it” was rated as least important ( $M=4.27$ ,  $SD=.79$ ) (Figure 5).



### **Soft skills in-class preparedness descriptive**

In the first category measuring the in-class level of preparedness of communication skills, students stated that they were best prepared in “listening with understanding” (M=3.91, SD=.87), while they consider to be least prepared in “providing quality feedback to subordinates” (M=3.58, SD=1.08) (Figure 1.1).

In the second category, measuring the in-class level of preparedness of leadership skills, hospitality students believe to be best prepared the best for “knowing basic theories of leadership” (M=3.92, SD=1.00), while they consider to be least prepared for “serving as a role model to your subordinates” (M=3.53, SD=1.03) (Figure 2.1).

In the third category measuring in-class level preparedness of teamwork skills, students believe to be prepared best for “interacting cooperatively with other team members” (M=3.89, SD=1.01), while they consider to be least prepared for “acknowledging the proper balance of each member’s workload” (M=3.73, SD=1.11) (Figure 3.1).

In the fourth category measuring the in-class level of preparedness of time-management skills, students believe to be prepared best for “using time effectively to organize personal workload” (M=3.85, SD=1.02), while they are least prepared for “organizing meetings and activities of others efficiently” (M=3.59, SD=1.06) (Figure 4.1).

In the fifth category measuring the in-class preparedness of problem-solving skills, students believe to be best prepared in “developing problem-solving strategy” (M=3.86, SD=.97), while they consider to be least prepared in “evaluating all possible solutions to the problem” (M=3.83, SD=.90) (Figure 5.1).

### **Soft skills co-op preparedness descriptive**

In the first category measuring the level of preparedness in communication skills during co-op, students believe co-op prepared them best in “maintaining the eye-contact” (M=3.90, SD=.98), while least in “using the appropriate tone of voice during conversation” (M=3.74, SD=1.04) (Figure 1.2).

In the second category of how well their co-op experience prepared students in leadership skills, the statement “leading teams and projects effectively” was rated highest (M=3.69, SD=1.07), while “serving as a role model to subordinates” was rated lowest (M=3.52, SD=.99) (Figure 2.2).

In the third category measuring the level of preparedness in teamwork skills students gain during co-op, the statement “interacting cooperatively with other team members” was rated highest (M=4.11, SD=.92), while the statement “acknowledging the proper balance of each member’s workload” was rated lowest (M=3.73, SD=1.09). (Figure 3.2)

In the fourth category measuring the level of co-op preparedness in time-management skills, students believe to be best prepared in “having fast reaction when the problem occurs” (M=4.04, SD=1.04), while least prepared in “meeting deadlines without rushing at last minute” (3.80, 1.08) (Figure 4.2).

In the final category measuring level of co-op preparedness in problem-solving skills, students consider to be best prepared in “choosing the best alternative to solve the problem” (M=3.96, SD=1.08), while “evaluating all possible solutions to the problem” was rated as the lowest level of preparation (M=3.87, SD=.99) (Figure 5.2). In the overall soft skills rating hospitality students ranked communication skills as most important (M=1.74, SD=1.09) while time-management skills were ranked as least important (M=3.65, SD= 1.25) (Figure 6).

### **Correlations**

When analyzing the connection among the categories it has been noted that participants who noted each soft skills category as important believe that they are very well in-class prepared for those skills, but do not believe the same to be true about their level of preparedness during cooperative education experiences. There is a significant correlation between the importance of skills and their in-class level of preparedness, opposed to their co-op preparedness where no correlation occurs.

### **One sample T-tests**

One sample T-test analysis was used to analyze means and standard deviations of each statement individually (Table1, Table2, Table3). This analysis was also used to compare means of students perceptions of importance opposed to their in-class and co-op level of preparedness. According to T-tests there is a significant difference between hospitality students' perceptions of importance ( $M \geq 4.10$ ) which was rated as more than average important in each category, while in-class preparedness and co-op preparedness were rated above average ( $M > 3.00 < 4.11$ ) (Table4, Table5).

### **One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA)**

In order to see if there was a significant difference recorder between genders and different graduate levels, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used.

### **Soft skills importance (ANOVA)**

In the category of communication skills importance there was a significant difference between genders in the three statements:

1. Maintaining eye contact during conversation was considered as more important to female participants ( $M=4.62$ ,  $SD=.63$ ) than male ( $M=4.14$ ,  $SD=.90$ ),  $F(2, 95) = 6.52$ ,  $p=.00$  (Figure 7).

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2. Using the appropriate tone of voice was also considered more important to female participants ( $M=4.47$ ,  $SD=0.91$ ) while male participants rated it as less important ( $M=3.95$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ),  $F(2, 95) = 3.38$ ,  $p=.04$  (Figure 7.1).

3. Providing quality feedback to your subordinates also had a significant difference between female participants ( $M=4.47$ ,  $SD=.89$ ) as opposed to male ( $M=4.07$ ,  $SD=.97$ ),  $F(2, 95) = 3.22$ ,  $p=.04$  (Figure 7.2).

In this category of the importance of communication skills there was no significant difference between perceptions of different graduate levels.

In the second category of the importance of leadership skills there was no significant difference between perceptions of male and female participants, but there was a significant difference in perceptions of students from different graduate levels when it comes to “being open to changes”. This statement was rated as important by freshman ( $M=4.47$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ), sophomore ( $M=4.78$ ,  $SD=.51$ ) and senior students ( $M=4.69$ ,  $SD=.87$ ) while there was a significant difference of the perception of junior students ( $M=4.18$ ,  $SD=.97$ ),  $F(3, 94) = 3.02$ ,  $p=.03$  (Figure 7.3)

In the category of teamwork importance, there was a significant difference between genders, when it comes to the statement “acknowledging proper balance among team members” where female participants ( $M=4.49$ ,  $SD=.61$ ) consider it more important than male participants ( $M=4.16$ ,  $SD=.83$ ),  $F(2, 95) = 4.27$ ,  $p=.02$  (Figure 7.4). Also, female participants consider “accepting individual difference among team members” ( $M=4.58$ ,  $SD=.60$ ) more important than male participants ( $M=4.32$ ,  $SD=.83$ ),  $F(2, 95) = 3.76$ ,  $p=.03$ . There was no significant difference among different graduate levels (Figure 7.5).

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In the category of time-management importance there was no significant difference between genders, but there was a significant difference between graduate levels in three following statements:

1. “Meeting deadlines without rushing at last minute” was rated as highly important by freshman ( $M=4.60$ ,  $SD=.63$ ), sophomore ( $M=4.48$ ,  $SD=.66$ ) and senior ( $M=4.13$ ,  $SD=0.86$ ) while it was less important to junior students ( $M=3.74$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ),  $F(3, 94) = 5.25$ ,  $p=.00$  (Figure 7.6).
2. “Using time effectively to organize personal workload” was rated as highly important by freshman ( $M=4.33$ ,  $SD=.90$ ), sophomore ( $M=4.57$ ,  $SD=.66$ ) and senior students ( $M=4.65$ ,  $SD=0.56$ ) while it was less important to junior students ( $M=4.00$ ,  $SD=.92$ ),  $F(3, 94) = 4.20$ ,  $p=.00$  (Figure 7.7).
3. “Having fast reaction when the problem occurs” was again rated higher by freshman ( $M=4.67$ ,  $SD=.49$ ), sophomore ( $M=4.73$ ,  $SD=.46$ ), and senior students ( $M=4.77$ ,  $SD=.43$ ), while it was considered less important by junior students ( $M=3.98$ ,  $SD=.98$ ),  $F(3, 93) = 9.71$ ,  $p=.00$  (Figure 7.8).

In the category of problem-solving skills importance there was a significant difference recorded between perceptions when it comes to the statement “developing problem-solving strategy” where female participants ( $M=4.58$ ,  $SD=.72$ ) believe that this development is more important than male ( $M=4.05$ ,  $SD=.96$ ),  $F(2,95)=5.06$ ,  $p=.00$  (Figure 7.9). There was as well a significant difference for this statement between different year levels where again junior students ( $M=4.06$ ,  $SD=1.01$ ) rated it at least important among other year levels; freshman ( $M=4.33$ ,  $SD=.72$ ), sophomore ( $M=4.70$ ,  $SD=.47$ ) and senior students ( $M=4.38$ ,  $SD=.80$ ),  $F(3, 94) = 2.59$ ,  $p=.00$  (Figure 7.10).

**Soft skills in-class preparedness (ANOVA)**

When it comes to in-class preparedness in communication skills there was a significant difference recorded between the genders when it comes to the following statements:

1. “Using the appropriate tone of voice during conversation” was rated as more important by female (M=3.85, SD=0.93) than male participants (M=3.36, SD=1.04),  $F(2, 95) = 3.16, p=.05$  (Figure 8).
2. “Providing quality feedback to subordinates” was rated as more important to female participants (M=3.83, SD=1.06) than male participants (M=3.30, SD=1.05),  $F(2, 94) = 2.87, p=.04$  (Figure 8.1).

There was also a significant difference recorded when it comes to different graduate level perceptions for the following categories:

1. “Maintaining the eye-contact during conversation” was considered less important by junior (M=3.44, SD=0.19) and senior students (M=3.65, SD=.20) while it was considered more important for freshman (M=4.13, SD=.26) and sophomore students (M=4.22, SD=.14),  $F(3, 94) = 3.69, p=.02$  (Figure 8.2).
2. “Using the appropriate tone of voice during conversation” was considered as very important by freshman students (M=4.00, SD=.85), while it was less important to sophomore (M=3.96, SD=.25), junior (M=3.32, SD=1.07) and senior students (M=3.50, SD=1.03),  $F(3, 94) = 2.87, p=.04$  (Figure 8.3).

In the category of leadership skills importance there was no significant differences between neither genders nor difference graduate level’s perceptions.

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In the category of teamwork in-class preparedness there was no significant difference between genders, but there was a significant difference recorded between different graduate levels when it comes to the statement “contributing to a common goal” where freshman students ( $M=4.40$ ,  $SD=.63$ ) rated it as highly important, while sophomore ( $M=3.91$ ,  $SD=.79$ ), junior ( $M=3.56$ ,  $SD=1.26$ ) and senior students ( $M=3.65$ ,  $SD=.89$ ) rated it a somewhat important;  $F(3, 94)=4.09$ ,  $p=.00$  (Figure 8.4).

In the category of the level of problem-solving skills in-class preparedness there was a significant difference recorded between genders where female participants rated the statement of “developing problem-solving strategy” as more important ( $M=4.13$ ,  $SD=.89$ ) than male participants who rated it as less important ( $M=3.55$ ,  $SD=.99$ ),  $F(2, 95)=5.16$ ,  $p=.00$  (Figure 8.5). On the other side, there was also a significant difference between graduate levels when it comes to “evaluating all possible solutions to the problem” where the lowest level of preparedness was recorded by sophomore ( $M=3.61$ ,  $SD=.72$ ) and senior students ( $M=3.54$ ,  $SD=.91$ ) while the highest responses were from freshman ( $M=4.13$ ,  $SD=.83$ ) and junior students ( $M=4.06$ ,  $SD=.98$ ),  $F(3, 94)=2.77$ ,  $p=.05$  (Figure 8.6).

### **Soft skills co-op preparedness (ANOVA)**

When it comes to level of co-op preparedness of communication skills and leadership skills there were no significant differences between neither genders nor different graduate levels.

In the category of the level of co-op preparedness in teamwork skills there was no significant difference between genders, but there was a significant difference recorded between graduate levels when it comes to the statement “acknowledging the proper balance of each member’s workload”, where sophomore ( $M=3.43$ ,  $SD=1.08$ ) and senior students ( $M=3.42$ ,  $SD=.90$ ) had lowest responses, while on the contrary, freshman ( $M=4.00$ ,  $SD=1.25$ ) and junior students ( $M=4.06$ ,  $SD=1.07$ ) had highest responses,  $F(3, 94)=2.73$ ,  $p=.05$  (Figure 9).

## SOFT SKILLS GAP

When it comes to the category of time-management skills and the level of preparedness in these skills provided by co-op experience there was no significant difference between genders' perceptions. On the other side, there were significant differences between graduate levels when it comes to statement "organizing meetings and activities of others effectively". For this particular statement, there was a difference in the level of preparedness between freshman students (M=4.47, SD=.92) who rated it as well preparing, while sophomore (M=3.30, SD=1.01), junior (M=3.52, SD=1.14) and senior students (M=3.88, SD=1.07) who had lowest level of preparation  $F(3, 94) = 3.55, p=.02$  (Figure 9.1).

The final category measuring the level of preparedness in problem-solving skills ensured by co-op experiences had no significant differences between genders, but there was a significant difference recorded between graduate levels when it comes to "defining problem carefully before solving it". Freshman (M=4.33, SD=.90) and junior (M=4.12, SD=1.04) students rated their level of co-op preparedness higher than sophomore (M=3.48, SD=1.02) and senior students (M=3.85, SD=.93) rated their level of preparedness lower;  $F(3, 94) = 2.69, p=.05$  (Figure 9.2).

In the overall skills ranking there was a significant difference recorded between perceptions of females (M=1.47, SD=0.80) than males (M=2.00, SD=1.22),  $F(2, 95) = 8.51, p=.00$  when it comes to communication skills being rated as the most important category of soft skills (Figure 6.1).

### **Results of open-ended questions**

There were two open-ended questions in the survey. In the first question participants were asked to write top three courses during their education that were most helpful in enhancing their soft skills. The results indicated the following three classes were identified as most helpful: Communication Techniques 20%, Leadership and Service Innovation 17%,



## SOFT SKILLS GAP

Negotiation and Conflict Resolution 11% as well as Business Continuity and Risk Management 10%. There were several other courses mentioned such as Critical Reading & Writing, HTM Fundamentals, Intercultural Communication and Technical writing, but not in substantial numbers (Figure 10).

In the second question participants were asked to name three other soft skills they would personally rate as important, that were not listed in the survey (such as: creative thinking, conflict management or emotional intelligence) . The results indicated the following skills as important most important: critical thinking 30%, conflict management 24%, and emotional intelligence 15%. There were several other skills and categories that were not mentioned in the survey but participants still considered them as important: open-mindedness, perseverance, personality, organization skills, innovation, sincerity, body language, and patience, and enthusiasm, empathy, thinking outside of the box, anger management and anticipation (Figure 11).

## DISCUSSION

In a similar research done by Brownell (1992), Scudder and Guinan (1989) it has been already suggested that soft skills are seen as crucial for college graduates when entering business world, especially in the current modern economy market. Similarly, English et al. (2007) found that most college graduates lack soft skills, mostly interpersonal communication skills. The findings of this study are consistent with those of Brownell (1992) and Scudder and Guinan (1989) because the majority of results in the survey were above average for the importance of soft skills for future careers. Thus, the results measuring the level of in-class and co-op preparedness of college graduates were significantly lower. The findings of this research support previous researches as well as prove the first two hypotheses which state that there is a significant gap between the importance of soft skills and in-class preparedness as well as between the level of in-class and co-op preparedness of college graduates when entering business world.

The results of this study indicate that college graduates consider communication skills as most important followed by teamwork, leadership, problem-solving and time-management skills being classified as least important. On the other hand, the results of the quantitative survey shown that there is a significant difference between the perceptions of students when it comes to in-class and co-op preparedness, where most students rated in-class preparedness as being of higher importance in communication and leadership skills, while teamwork, time-management and problem-solving skills had highest rating within the co-op level of preparedness. The author of this research claims that these results were not surprising considering that teamwork, time-management and problem-solving skills are 21st century skills used at almost every workplace, while communication skills can be more efficiently enhanced through in-class experiences.

## SOFT SKILLS GAP

Moreover, it can be stated that leadership skills can be both acquired in-class and during co-op education by learning leadership theories in class, but also enhancing their knowledge through real-life practices during co-op. The latest trends in hospitality have proven that there is a need for the improvement of educational systems in order to adapt learning processes and materials to recent technological changes which are transforming the today's ever-demanding market. Considering a consistent demand for soft skills competencies it is clear that hospitality industry is expecting education to be ahead of changes, especially when it comes to building attitude and character of future employees. Changes in education might potentially lead to the risk of structural misunderstanding between the industry and generational gaps.

Interestingly, even the other two hypothesis of this research were also confirmed. There is a significant gap between genders and different graduate levels when it comes to importance and the level of preparedness of soft skills. There is also a significant difference between almost every statement measuring importance of soft skills, where women believe soft skills are more important than men. On the other side, there is a significant gap between different graduate levels with an interesting pattern of junior students rating soft skills lower than freshman, junior and senior students. Thus, there are several statements in which freshman and junior students have different perceptions from sophomore and senior students.

It is clearly shown that the differences between graduate levels of college students can be visible due to different age levels as well as the amount of experience either in-class or over co-op. The author claims that there is a significant difference between freshman students' perceptions who have just finished one co-op and then enrolled college, as opposed to sophomore and juniors who have had more college experience, as well as seniors who have already completed four cooperative educational experiences and thus completed at least total of 1200 working hours and are already found a full-time job in the industry.

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It is believed that educational institutions and hospitality industry companies are those who can benefit mostly from the findings in this research. The results thereby attained have confirmed that there is a “competency gap” between the perceptions of the soft skills that hospitality students consider important if compared to the level of their in-class or co-op preparedness. When a complete analysis of this gap is made and the full significance completely understood, it will be more evident to see if educational institutions should put their efforts in improving and adapting the college curriculum to hospitality industry changes and set their demands in order to meet expectations of the students as well as ensure them to have proper preparation for future careers in this industry. Thus, companies operating in hospitality industry should focus more on the education and training programs for their employees in order to follow-up with the recent trends and it is also necessary that both companies and the industry itself works together with relevant educational institutions of higher education towards closing the “competency gap”.

The future of competence building process for hospitality students and employees in hospitality industry should include building of all three categories: knowledge, attitude and skills for students and employees in hospitality. In other words, college graduates are expected to be a combination of “head, hand and heart”, meaning that employees of the future should be knowledgeable, technically smart and possessing a character and personality. Furthermore, in order to satisfy their future employers, college graduates have to implement the “tree” metaphor where stability and flexibility are the two pillars of success. Stability is continuity which is in this metaphor represented as a hard skill or technical knowledge, while flexibility is seems as adapting to changes and incorporating soft skills knowledge. In order to succeed one has to be stable like a tree but flexible like branches who together ensure the added value to an individual. ("Baroda Management Association, Vadodara, India.")

## SOFT SKILLS GAP

The final part of the survey offered open-ended questions in which students rated top three courses that according to their opinions enhanced their soft skills competencies. Communication Techniques, Leadership and Service Innovation and Negotiation and Conflict Resolution were rated highest and chosen by most students. The second open-ended question asked participants to identify other soft skills students consider important but were not listed in the survey.

What author claims to be interesting are the skills that freshman students rated as important: open-mindedness, perseverance, personality, organization skills, innovation, sincerity, body language, patience, and enthusiasm, empathy, thinking outside of the box, anger management and anticipation.

The findings of this research paper are subject to certain limitations. First, the author was limited to Dubrovnik region, or more specifically to only RIT Croatia students with a relatively small sample size of only 98 students, which makes it hard to generalize and draw precise conclusions about college students in general. Secondly, since surveys were distributed in-class, the obtained results can be read as relatively reliable, due to the possibility of having biased or misunderstood questions, as well as to the limited time to complete the survey. Due to these limitations, this research could be the base for further researches which might investigate perceptions of importance of soft skills as opposed to in-class and co-op level of preparedness on a bigger sample size. The author finds relevant also conducting the same research which would include entry-level managers in hospitality industry to see if there is a gap between hospitality students preparing for future careers and entry-level managers with working experience. Finally, it could be also interesting to conduct the research among faculty members and professors.

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APPENDIX A

<i>When responding to this survey please rate:</i>	<b>How important are the following soft skills for your future career?</b>	<b>How well in-class materials prepared you for the following soft skills?</b>	<b>How well co-ops prepared you for the following soft skills?</b>
	<i>1-not important 5-very important</i>	<i>1- poorly prepared 5- well-prepared</i>	<i>1-poorly prepared 5- well-prepared</i>
<b>Communication Skills</b>			
Listening with understanding.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Developing and maintaining the eye contact.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Using appropriate tone of voice during conversation.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Providing quality feedback to subordinates during the conversation.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Leadership Skills</b>			
Knowing the basic theories of leadership.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Serving as a role model to subordinates.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Leading teams and projects effectively.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Being open to changes.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Teamwork skills</b>			
Contributing to a common goal.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Acknowledging the proper balance of each member’s workload.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Interacting cooperatively with other team members.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Accepting individual differences among members.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
<b>Time-Management Skills</b>			
Meeting deadlines without rushing at the last minute.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Using time effectively to organize personal workload.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Having fast reaction when the problem occurs.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5
Organizing meetings and activities of others efficiently.	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3 4 5

SOFT SKILLS GAP

**Problem-Solving Skills**

Developing a problem-solving strategy.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Defining each problem carefully before solving it.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluating all possible solutions to the problem.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Choosing the best alternative to solve the problem.	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

**1. Gender:**

- Male                       Female                       Other

**2. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?**

- High school graduate       Associate degree       Bachelor’s degree

**3. If currently enrolled at college, which is your year level:**

- Freshman                       Sophomore                       Junior                       Senior

**6. List the top three courses you took that were most helpful in enhancing your soft skills.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**7. List any other soft skills you personally would rate as important, that were not listed in the survey. (Such as: creative thinking, conflict management or emotional intelligence)**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Please rank the soft skills listed below from 1 to 5 (1 being the most important and 5 being the least important skill)**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Communication
- \_\_\_\_\_ Leadership
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teamwork
- \_\_\_\_\_ Time-Management
- \_\_\_\_\_ Problem-Solving

## APPENDIX B

**Table 1** Perception of the soft skills hospitality students consider important for success in hospitality industry

<b>Variable- Soft Skills Importance</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>Communication Skills</b>			
Listening with understanding.	98	4.63	.72
Developing and maintaining the eye contact.	98	4.39	.81
Using appropriate tone of voice during conversation.	98	4.23	1.00
Providing quality feedback to subordinates during the conversation.	98	4.28	.95
<b>Leadership Skills</b>			
Knowing the basic theories of leadership.	98	4.06	1.16
Serving as a role model to subordinates.	98	4.11	.84
Leading teams and projects effectively.	98	4.40	.93
Being open to changes.	98	4.50	.87
<b>Teamwork skills</b>			
Contributing to a common goal.	98	4.29	1.06
Acknowledging the proper balance of each member's workload.	98	4.33	.74
Interacting cooperatively with other team members.	98	4.41	.85
Accepting individual differences among members.	98	4.45	.73
<b>Time-Management Skills</b>			
Meeting deadlines without rushing at the last minute.	98	4.17	.91
Using time effectively to organize personal workload.	98	4.36	.82
Having fast reaction when the problem occurs.	98	4.45	.78
Organizing meetings and activities of others efficiently.	98	4.18	.93
<b>Problem-Solving Skills</b>			
Developing a problem-solving strategy.	98	4.34	.87
Defining each problem carefully before solving it.	98	4.27	.79
Evaluating all possible solutions to the problem.	98	4.31	.74
Choosing the best alternative to solve the problem.	98	4.42	.82

**Table 2** Perception of in-class preparedness of soft skills of hospitality students

<b>Variable- Soft Skills In-Class Preparedness</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>Communication Skills</b>			
Listening with understanding.	98	3.92	.87
Developing and maintaining the eye contact.	98	3.79	1.02
Using appropriate tone of voice during conversation.	98	3.62	1.00
Providing quality feedback to subordinates during the conversation.	98	3.58	1.08
<b>Leadership Skills</b>			
Knowing the basic theories of leadership.	98	3.92	1.00
Serving as a role model to subordinates.	98	3.53	1.03
Leading teams and projects effectively.	98	3.79	1.06
Being open to changes.	98	3.76	1.07
<b>Teamwork skills</b>			
Contributing to a common goal.	98	3.80	1.02
Acknowledging the proper balance of each member's workload.	98	3.73	1.11
Interacting cooperatively with other team members.	98	3.89	1.01
Accepting individual differences among members.	98	3.87	1.03
<b>Time-Management Skills</b>			
Meeting deadlines without rushing at the last minute.	98	3.74	1.06
Using time effectively to organize personal workload.	98	3.85	1.02
Having fast reaction when the problem occurs.	98	3.81	1.00
Organizing meetings and activities of others efficiently.	98	3.59	1.06
<b>Problem-Solving Skills</b>			
Developing a problem-solving strategy.	98	3.86	.97
Defining each problem carefully before solving it.	98	3.84	1.04
Evaluating all possible solutions to the problem.	98	3.83	.91
Choosing the best alternative to solve the problem.	98	3.83	.99

**Table 3** Perception of co-op preparedness of soft skills of hospitality students

<b>Variable- Soft Skills Co-op preparedness</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>Communication Skills</b>			
Listening with understanding.	98	3.88	.93
Developing and maintaining the eye contact.	98	3.90	.98
Using appropriate tone of voice during conversation.	98	3.74	1.04
Providing quality feedback to subordinates during the conversation.	98	3.85	1.13
<b>Leadership Skills</b>			
Knowing the basic theories of leadership.	98	3.57	1.05
Serving as a role model to subordinates.	98	3.52	.99
Leading teams and projects effectively.	98	3.69	1.07
Being open to changes.	98	3.67	1.15
<b>Teamwork skills</b>			
Contributing to a common goal.	98	4.09	.76
Acknowledging the proper balance of each member's workload.	98	3.73	1.09
Interacting cooperatively with other team members.	98	4.11	.92
Accepting individual differences among members.	98	3.90	1.03
<b>Time-Management Skills</b>			
Meeting deadlines without rushing at the last minute.	98	3.80	1.08
Using time effectively to organize personal workload.	98	3.85	1.13
Having fast reaction when the problem occurs.	98	4.04	1.04
Organizing meetings and activities of others efficiently.	98	3.82	1.13
<b>Problem-Solving Skills</b>			
Developing a problem-solving strategy.	98	3.94	1.02
Defining each problem carefully before solving it.	98	3.93	1.06
Evaluating all possible solutions to the problem.	98	3.87	.99
Choosing the best alternative to solve the problem.	98	3.96	1.08

## SOFT SKILLS GAP

**Table 4** The differences between the soft skills importance and in-class preparedness perceptions of hospitality students

<b>Variable- Importance vs. In-Class Preparedness Gap</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>P<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>GAP</b>
<b>Communication Skills</b>			
Listening with understanding.	4.63	3.92	.71
Developing and maintaining the eye contact.	4.39	3.79	.60
Using appropriate tone of voice during conversation.	4.23	3.62	.61
Providing quality feedback to subordinates during the conversation.	4.28	3.58	.70
<b>Leadership Skills</b>			
Knowing the basic theories of leadership.	4.06	3.92	.14
Serving as a role model to subordinates.	4.11	3.53	.58
Leading teams and projects effectively.	4.40	3.79	.61
Being open to changes.	4.50	3.76	.74
<b>Teamwork skills</b>			
Contributing to a common goal.	4.29	3.80	.49
Acknowledging the proper balance of each member's workload.	4.33	3.73	.60
Interacting cooperatively with other team members.	4.41	3.89	.52
Accepting individual differences among members.	4.45	3.87	.58
<b>Time-Management Skills</b>			
Meeting deadlines without rushing at the last minute.	4.17	3.74	.43
Using time effectively to organize personal workload.	4.36	3.85	.51
Having fast reaction when the problem occurs.	4.45	3.81	.64
Organizing meetings and activities of others efficiently.	4.18	3.59	.59
<b>Problem-Solving Skills</b>			
Developing a problem-solving strategy.	4.34	3.86	.48
Defining each problem carefully before solving it.	4.27	3.84	.43
Evaluating all possible solutions to the problem.	4.31	3.83	.48
Choosing the best alternative to solve the problem.	4.42	3.83	.59

\*I=Importance \*P<sup>1</sup>= In-class preparedness \*the gap is the difference between the mean score of importance and in-class preparedness.

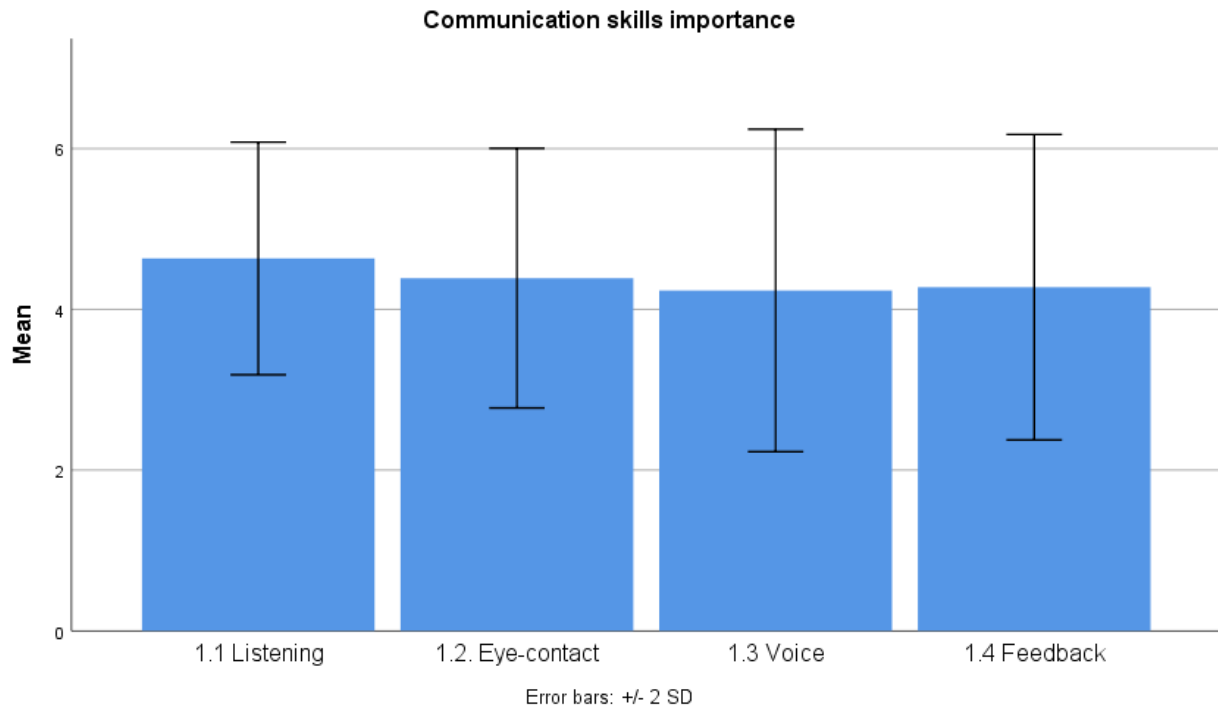
## SOFT SKILLS GAP

**Table 5** The differences between the soft skills importance and co-op preparedness perceptions of hospitality students

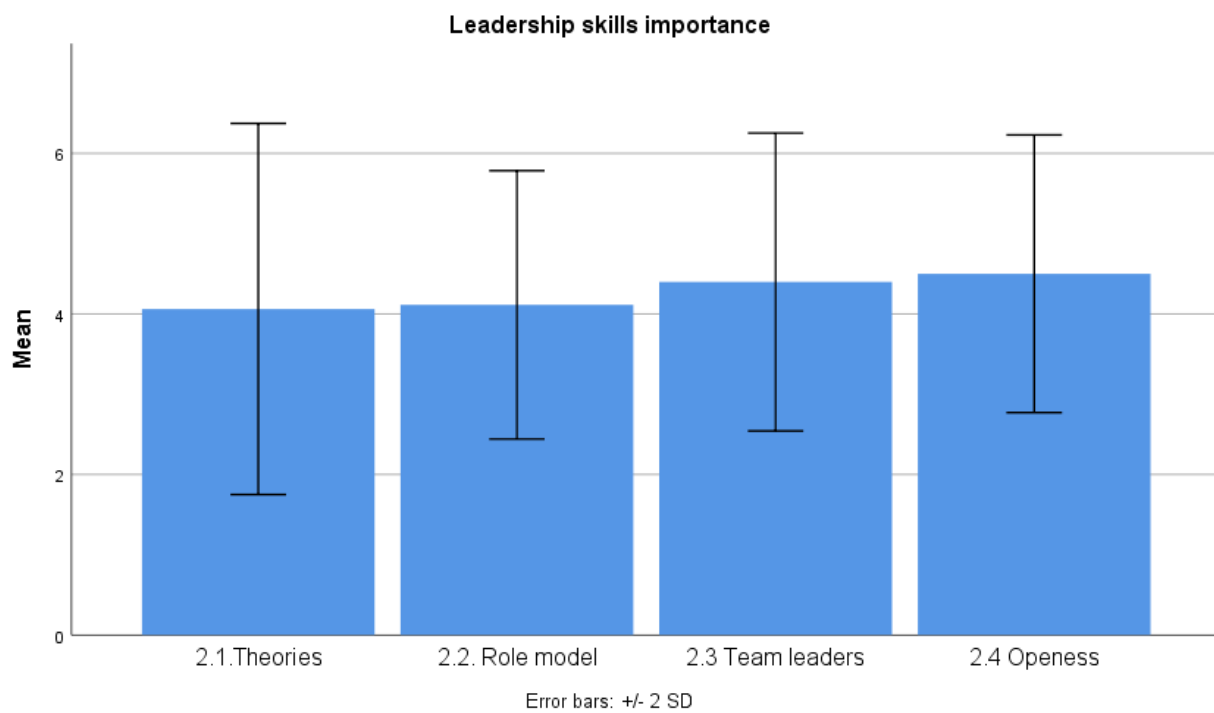
<b>Variable- Importance vs. Co-Op Preparedness Gap</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>P<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>GAP</b>
<b>Communication Skills</b>			
Listening with understanding.	4.63	3.88	.75
Developing and maintaining the eye contact.	4.39	3.90	.49
Using appropriate tone of voice during conversation.	4.23	3.74	.49
Providing quality feedback to subordinates during the conversation.	4.28	3.85	.43
<b>Leadership Skills</b>			
Knowing the basic theories of leadership.	4.06	3.57	.49
Serving as a role model to subordinates.	4.11	3.52	.59
Leading teams and projects effectively.	4.40	3.69	.71
Being open to changes.	4.50	3.67	.83
<b>Teamwork skills</b>			
Contributing to a common goal.	4.29	4.09	.20
Acknowledging the proper balance of each member's workload.	4.33	3.73	.60
Interacting cooperatively with other team members.	4.41	4.11	.30
Accepting individual differences among members.	4.45	3.90	.65
<b>Time-Management Skills</b>			
Meeting deadlines without rushing at the last minute.	4.17	3.80	.37
Using time effectively to organize personal workload.	4.36	3.85	.51
Having fast reaction when the problem occurs.	4.45	4.04	.41
Organizing meetings and activities of others efficiently.	4.18	3.82	.36
<b>Problem-Solving Skills</b>			
Developing a problem-solving strategy.	4.34	3.94	.40
Defining each problem carefully before solving it.	4.27	3.93	.34
Evaluating all possible solutions to the problem.	4.31	3.87	.44
Choosing the best alternative to solve the problem.	4.42	3.96	.46

\*I= importance \*P<sup>2</sup>= Co-op preparedness \*the gap is the difference between the mean score of importance and co-op preparedness.

**Figure 1 Hospitality industry students' perceptions of the importance of communication skills.**



**Figure 2 Hospitality industry students' perceptions of the importance of leadership skills**

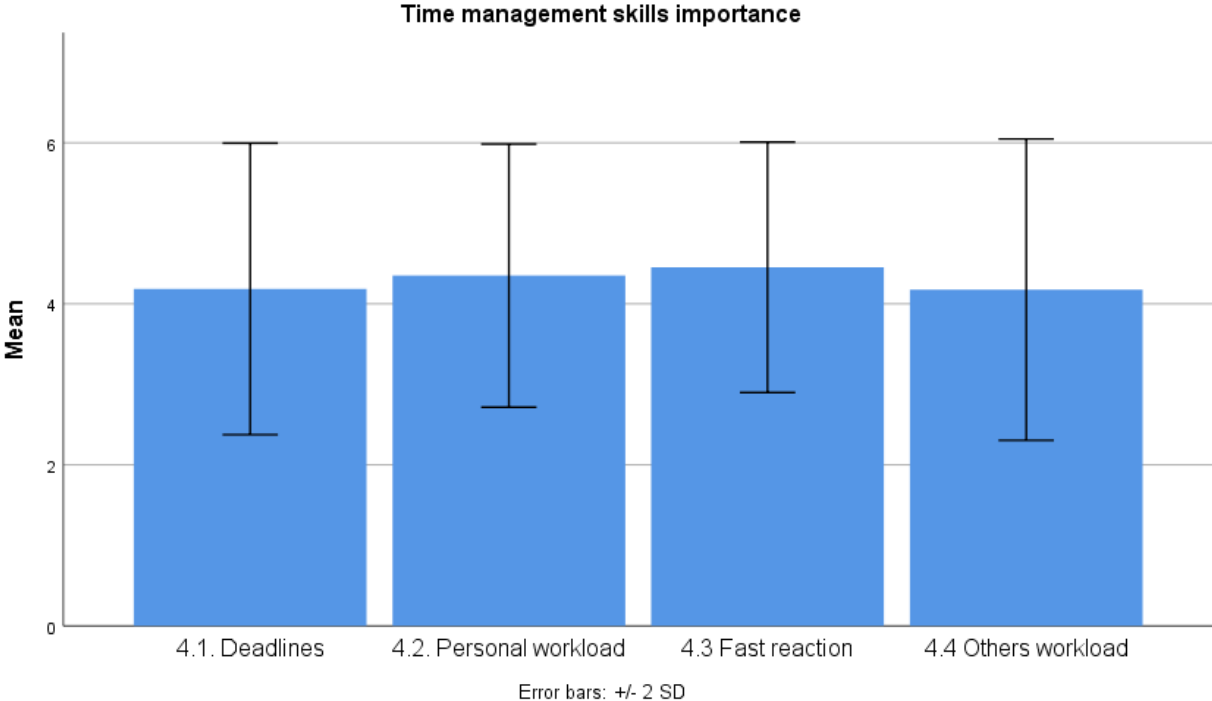




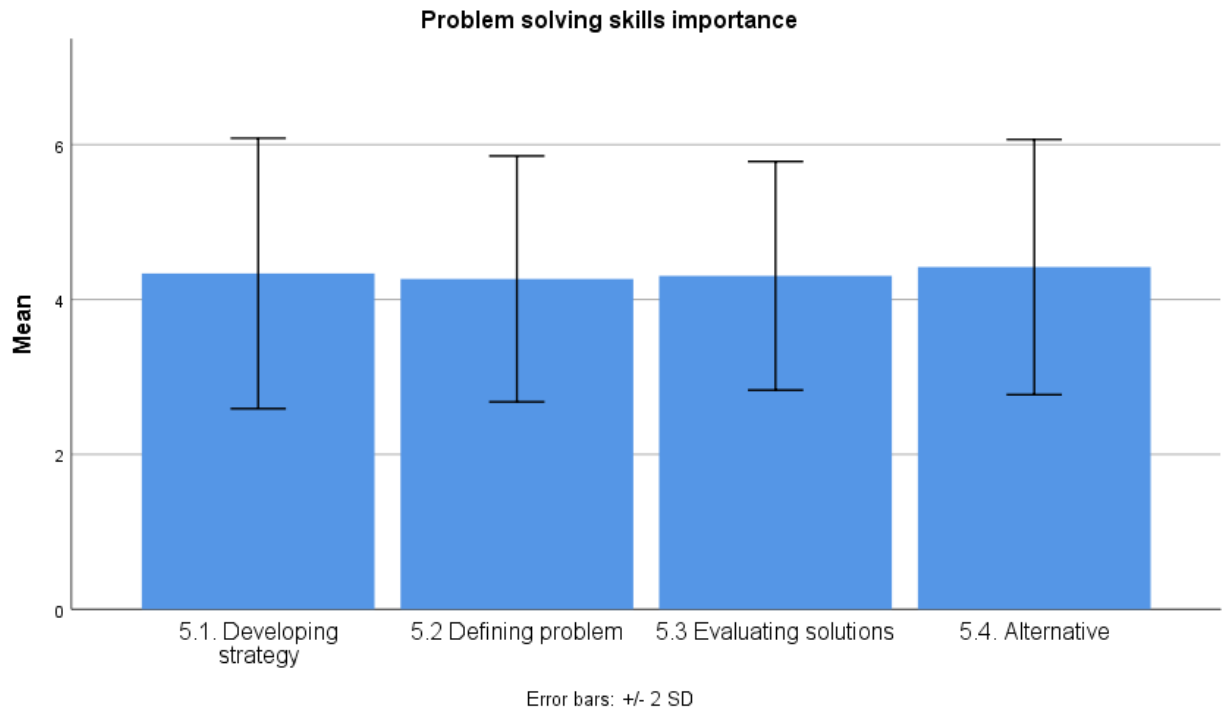
**Figure 3 Hospitality industry students' perceptions of the importance of teamwork skills**



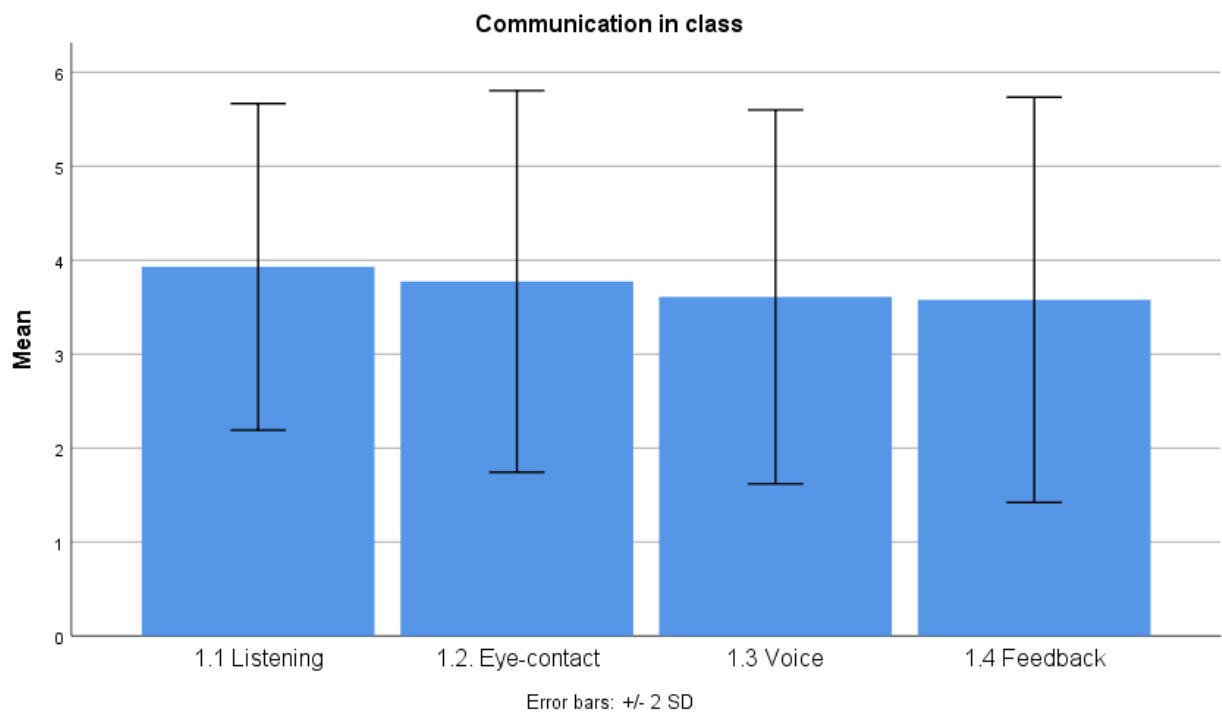
**Figure 4 Hospitality industry students' perceptions of the importance of time-management skills**



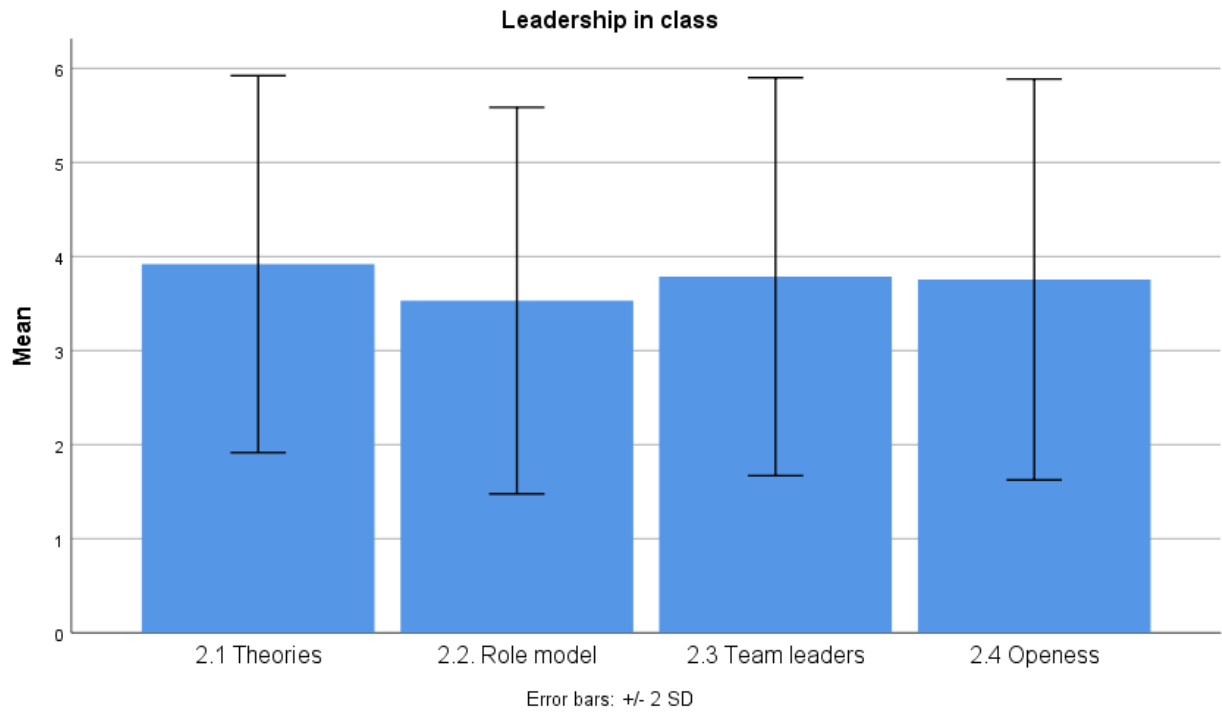
**Figure 5 Hospitality industry students' perceptions of the importance of problem-solving skills.**



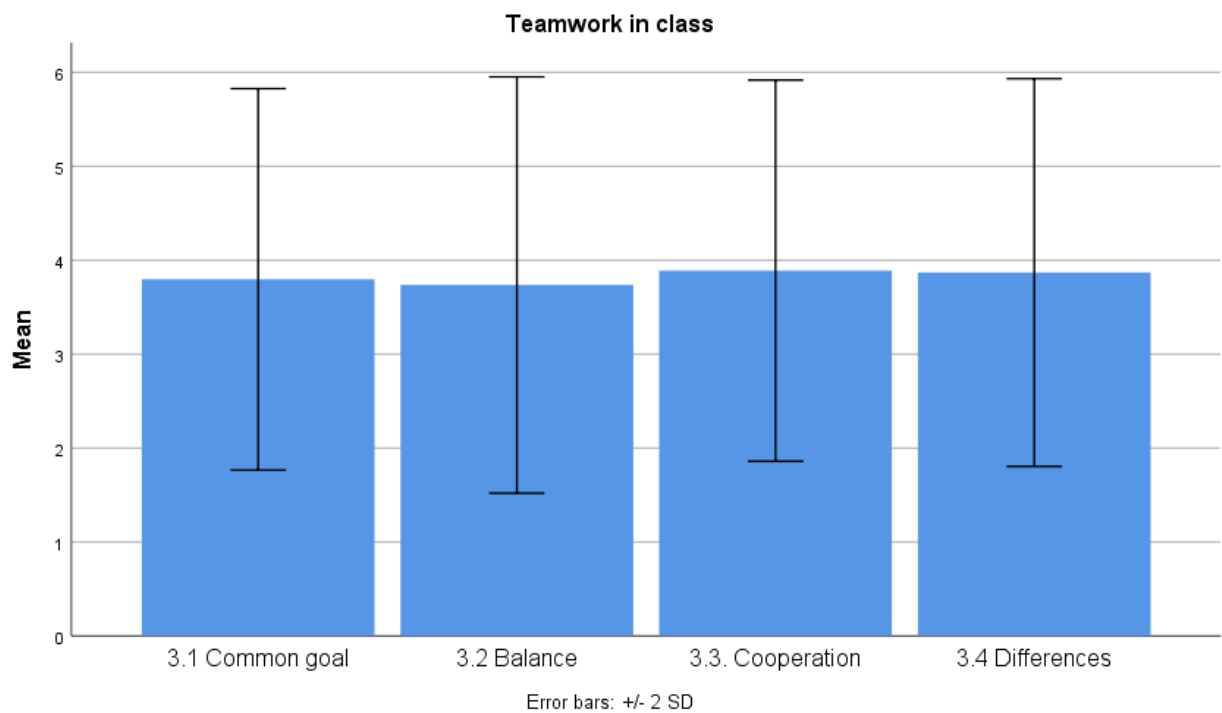
**Figure 1.1 Hospitality industry students' perceptions of their in-class level of preparedness in communication skills**



**Figure 2.1 Hospitality industry students' perceptions of their in-class level of preparedness in leadership skills**



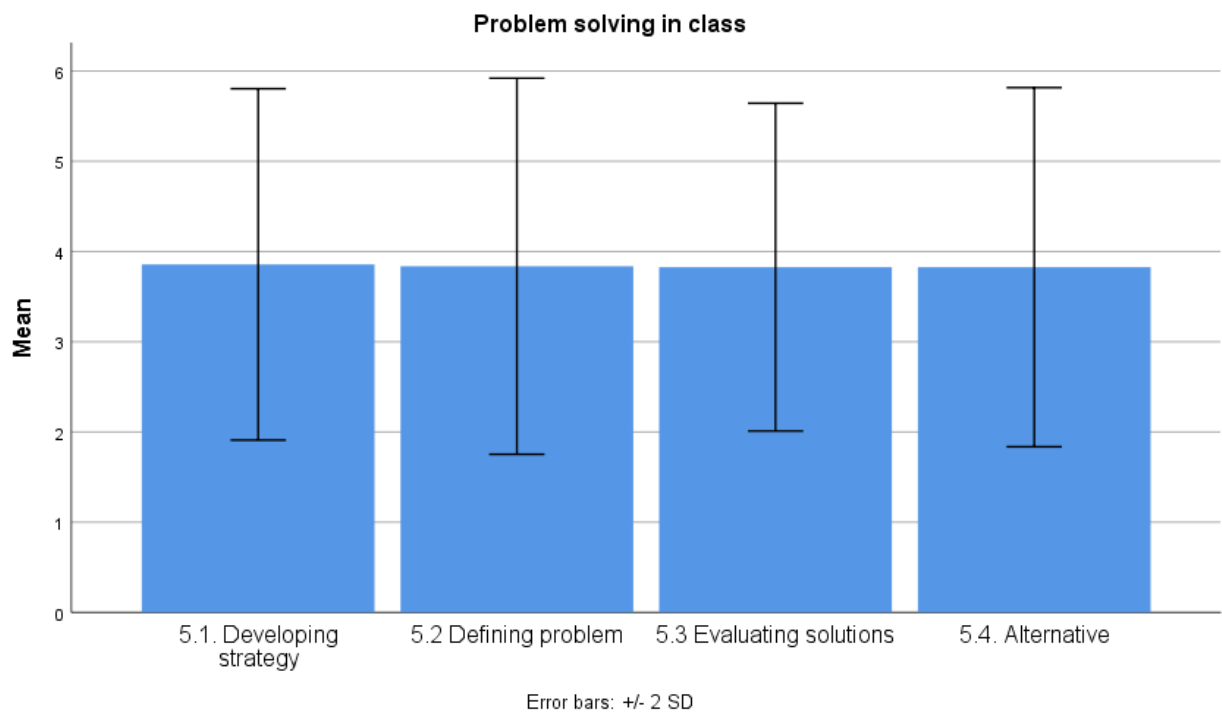
**Figure 3.1 Hospitality industry students' perceptions of their in-class level of preparedness in teamwork skills**



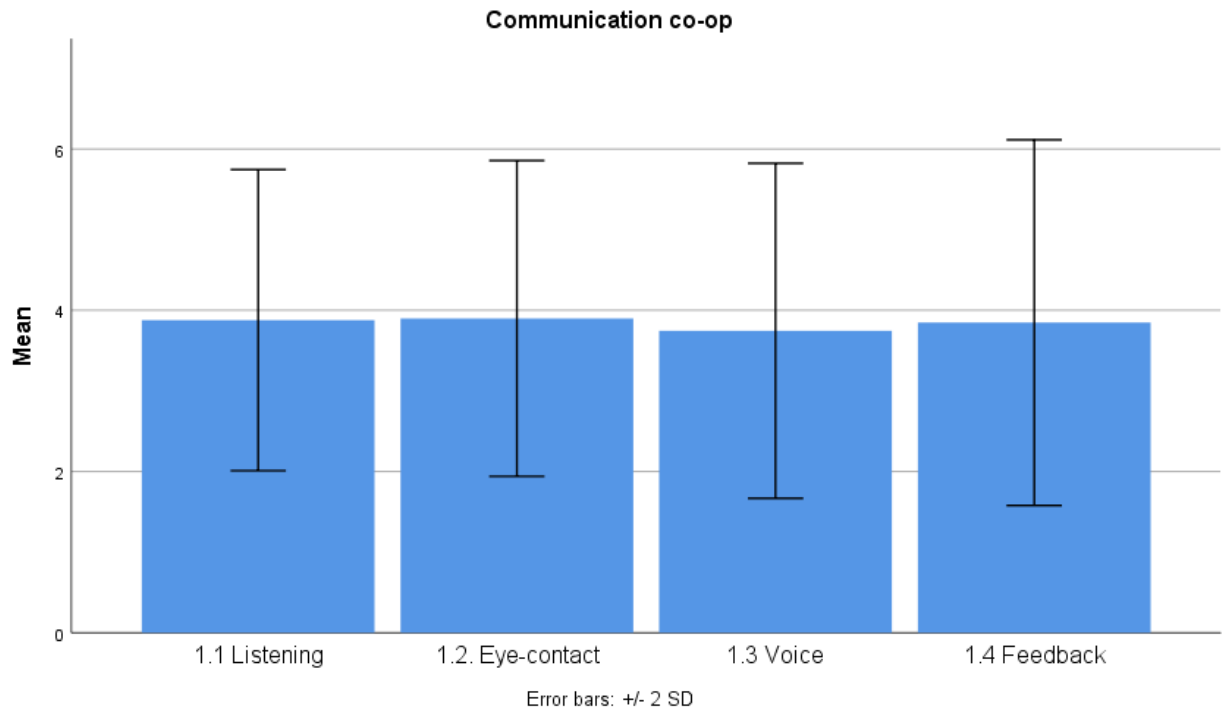
**Figure 4.1 Hospitality industry students' perceptions of their in-class level of preparedness in time-management skills**



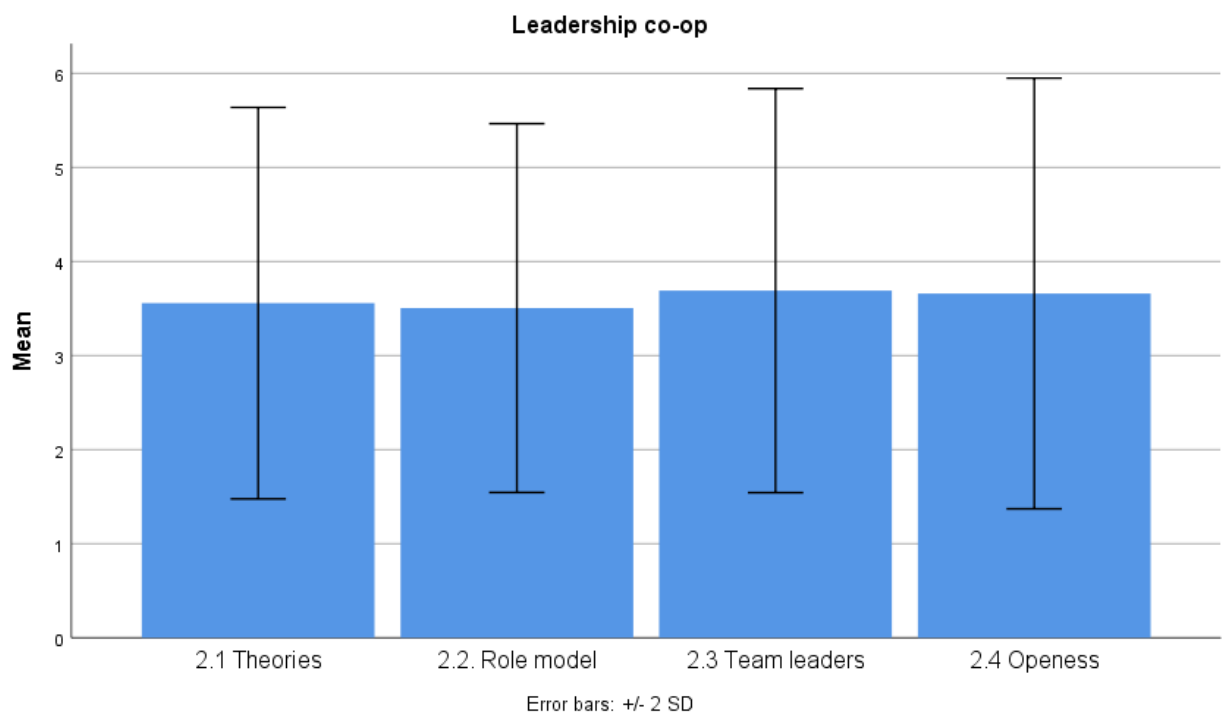
**Figure 5.1 Hospitality industry students' perceptions of their in-class level of preparedness in problem-solving skills**



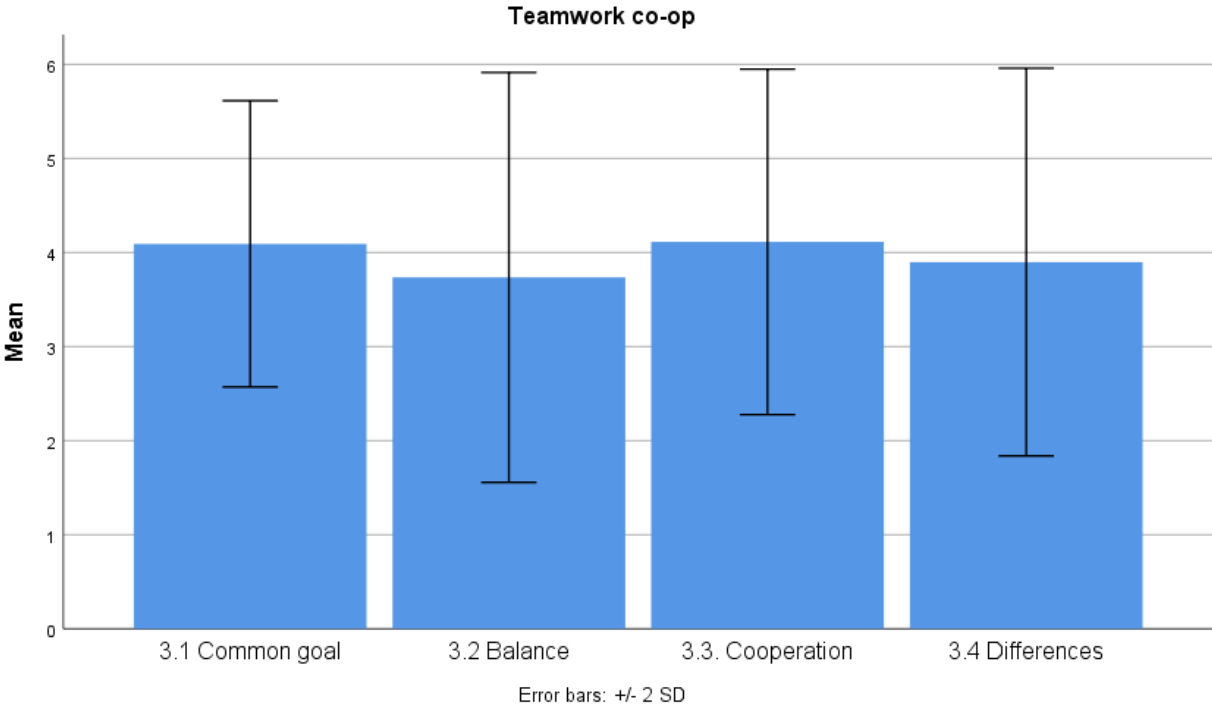
**Figure 1.3 Hospitality industry students' perceptions of their level of co-op preparedness in communication skills**



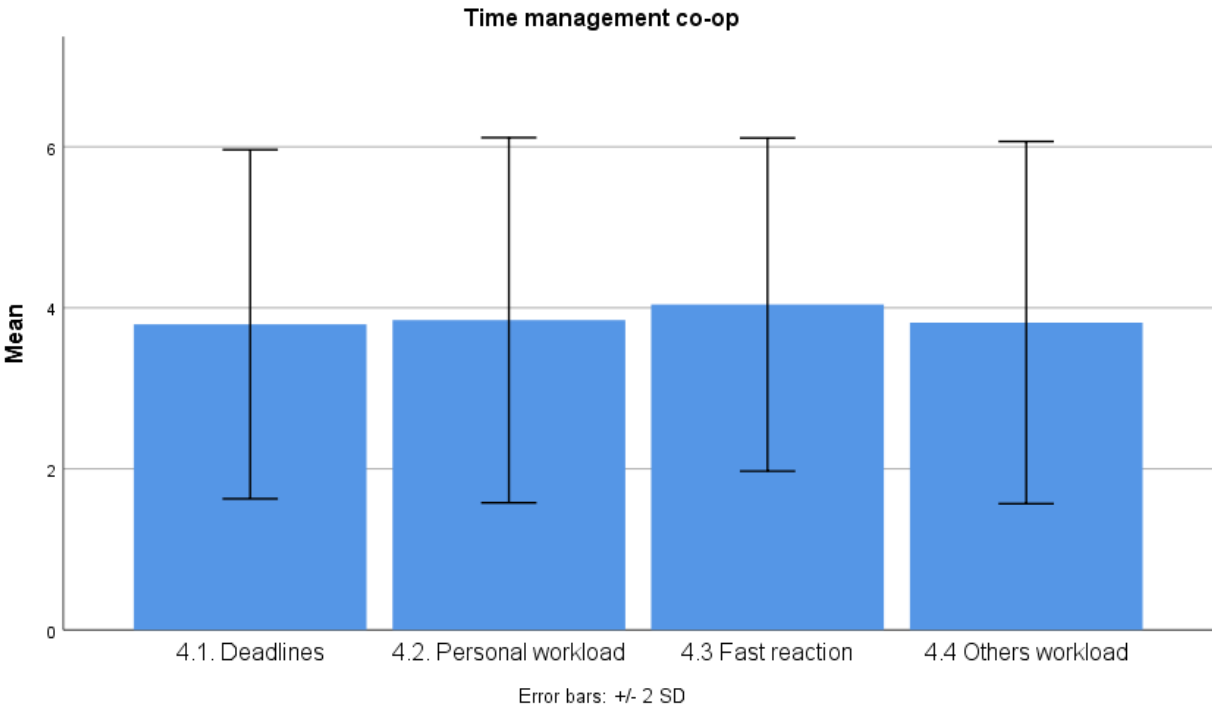
**Figure 2.3 Hospitality industry students' perceptions of their level of co-op preparedness in leadership skills**



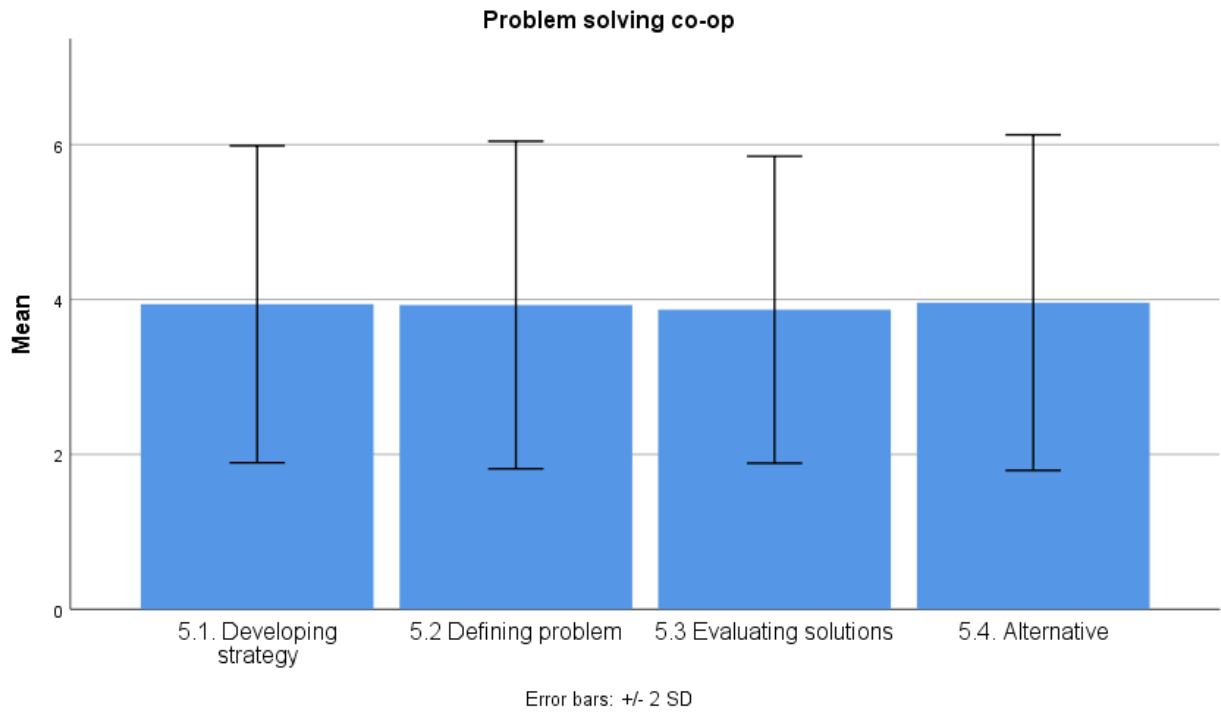
**Figure 3.3** Hospitality industry students' perceptions of their level of co-op preparedness in teamwork skills



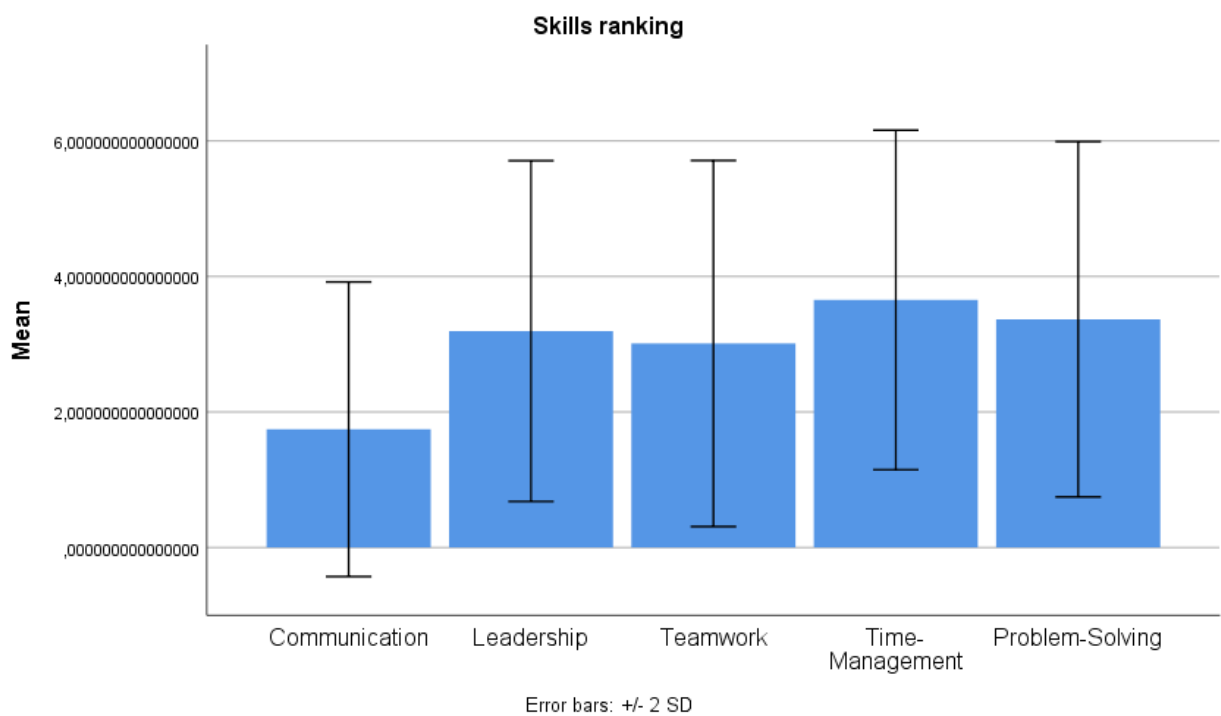
**Figure 4.3** Hospitality industry students' perceptions of their level of co-op preparedness in time-management skills



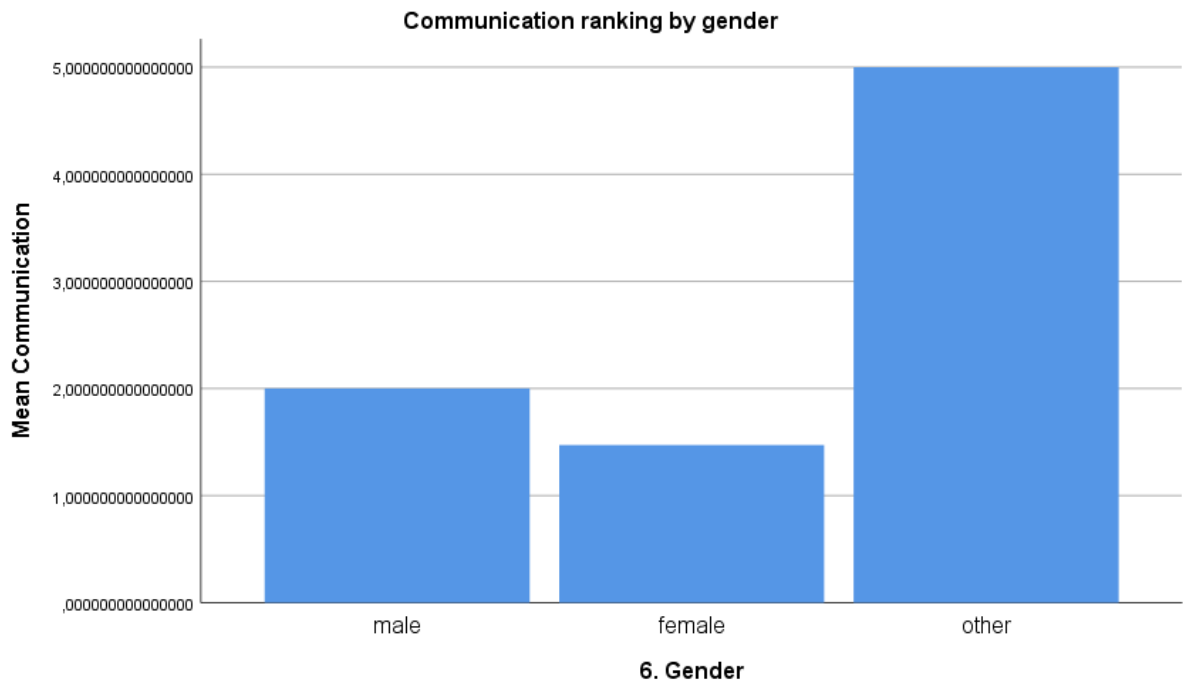
**Figure 5.3 Hospitality industry students' perceptions of their level of co-op preparedness in problem-solving skills**



**Figure 6 Soft skills ranking from 1 being most important to 5 least important skill**



**Figure 6.1 Ranking skills differences by gender in the category of communication**



**Figure 7**

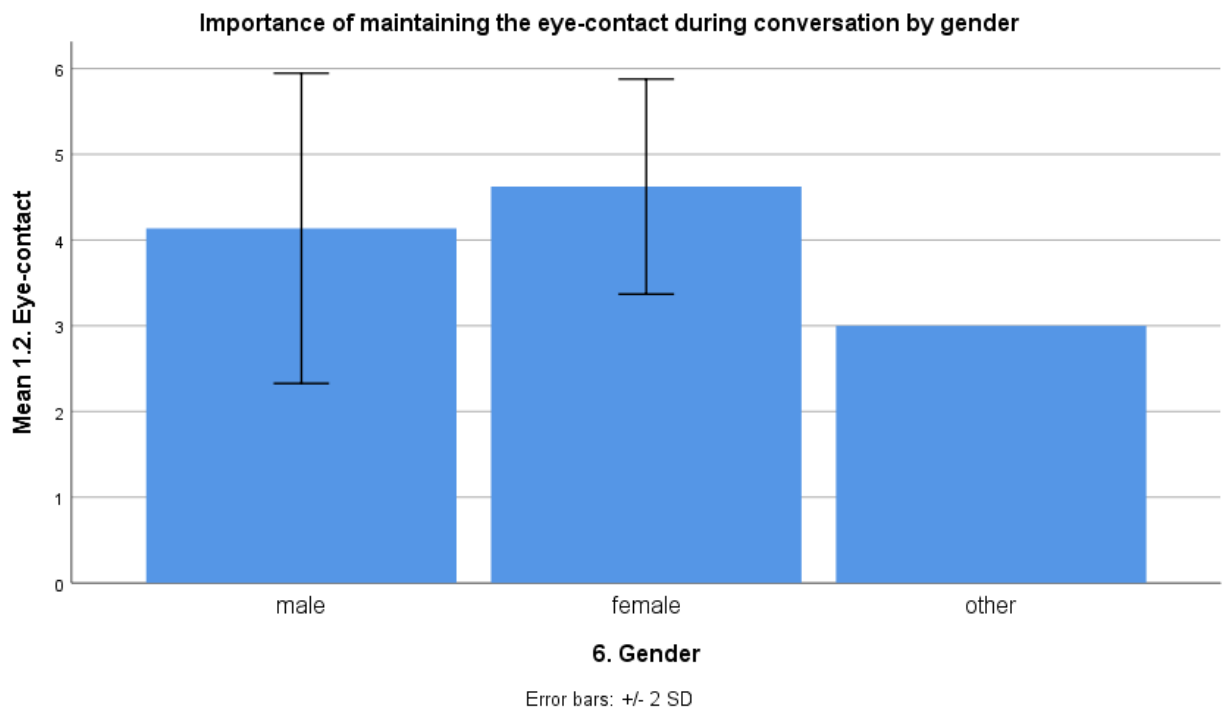




Figure 7.1

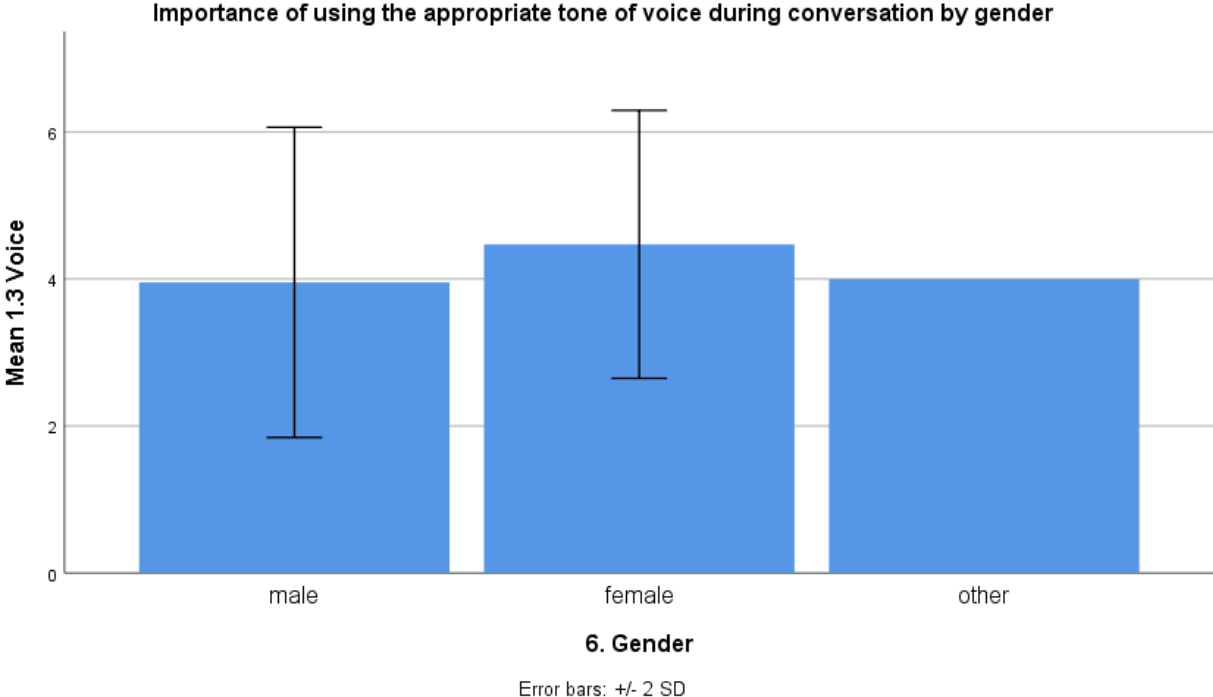


Figure 7.2

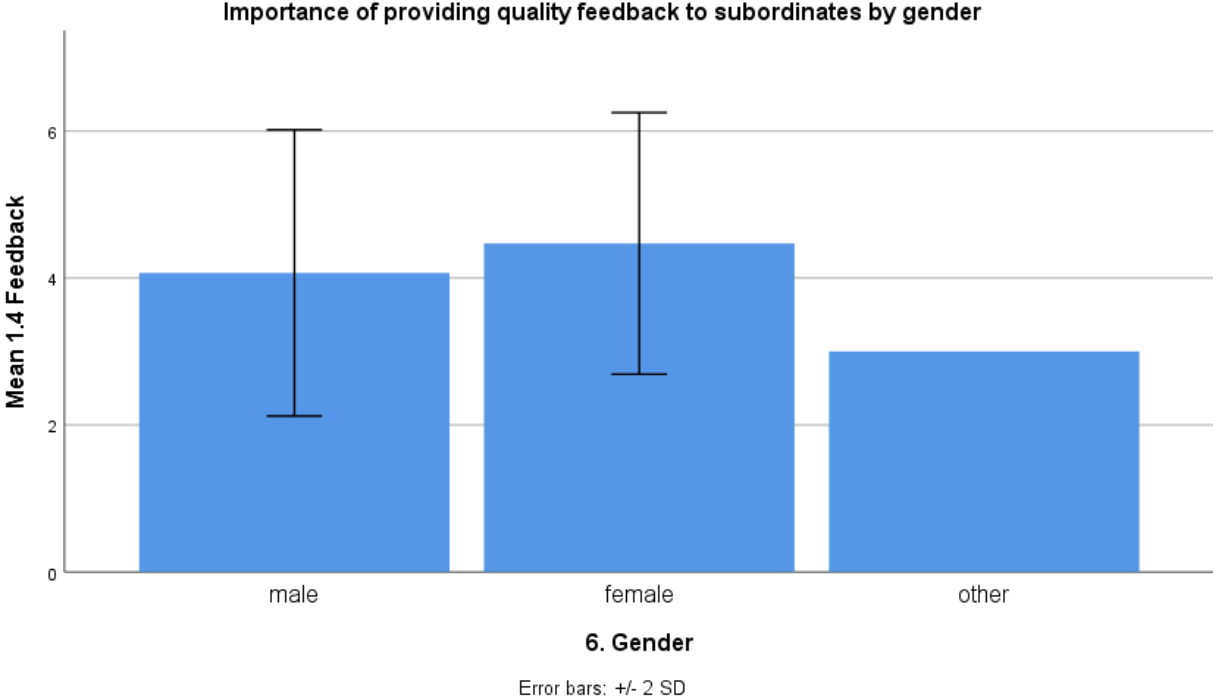


Figure 7.3

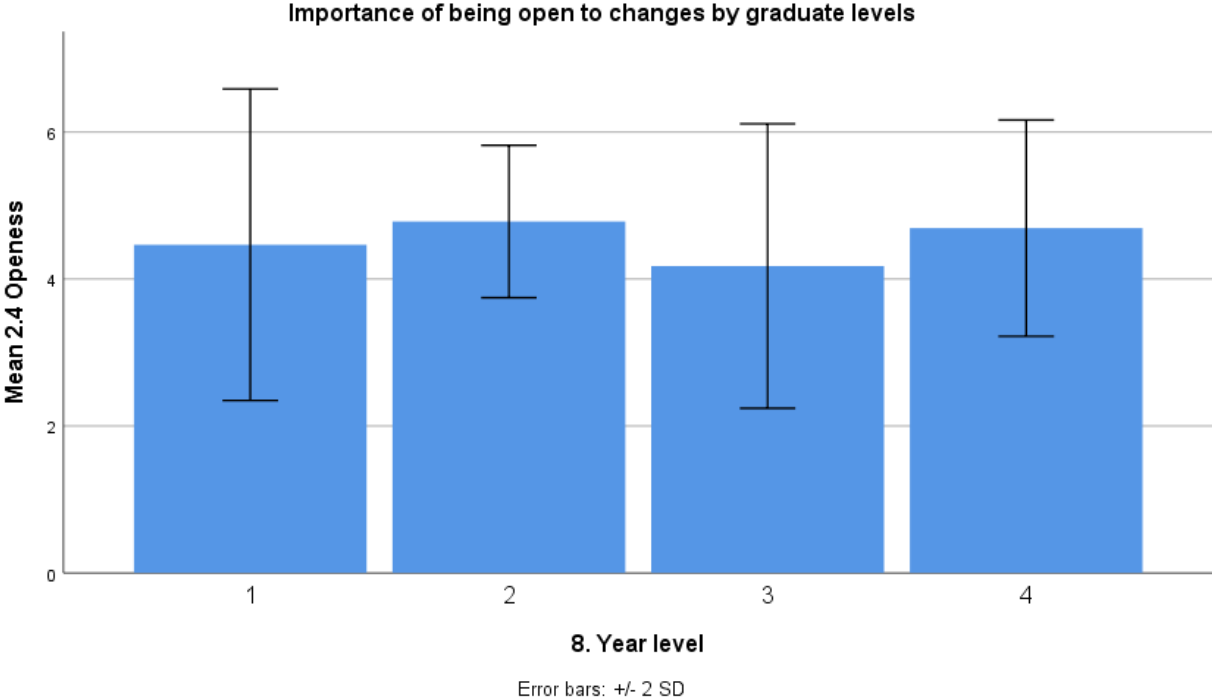


Figure 7.4

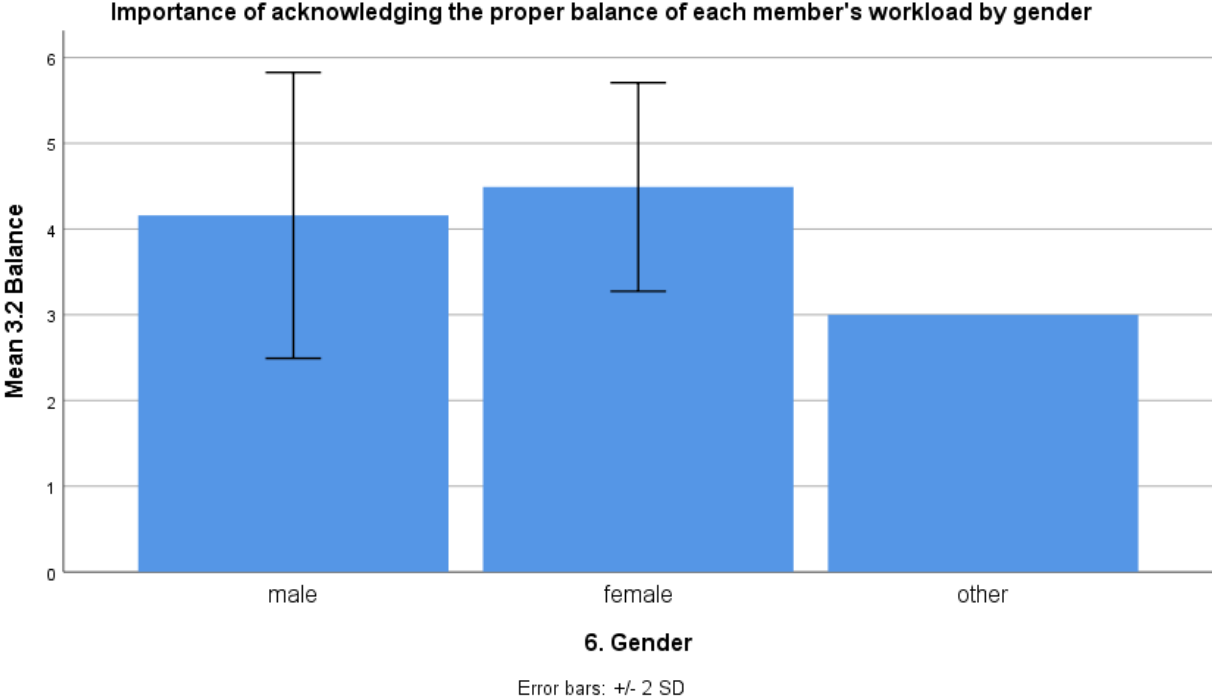


Figure 7.5

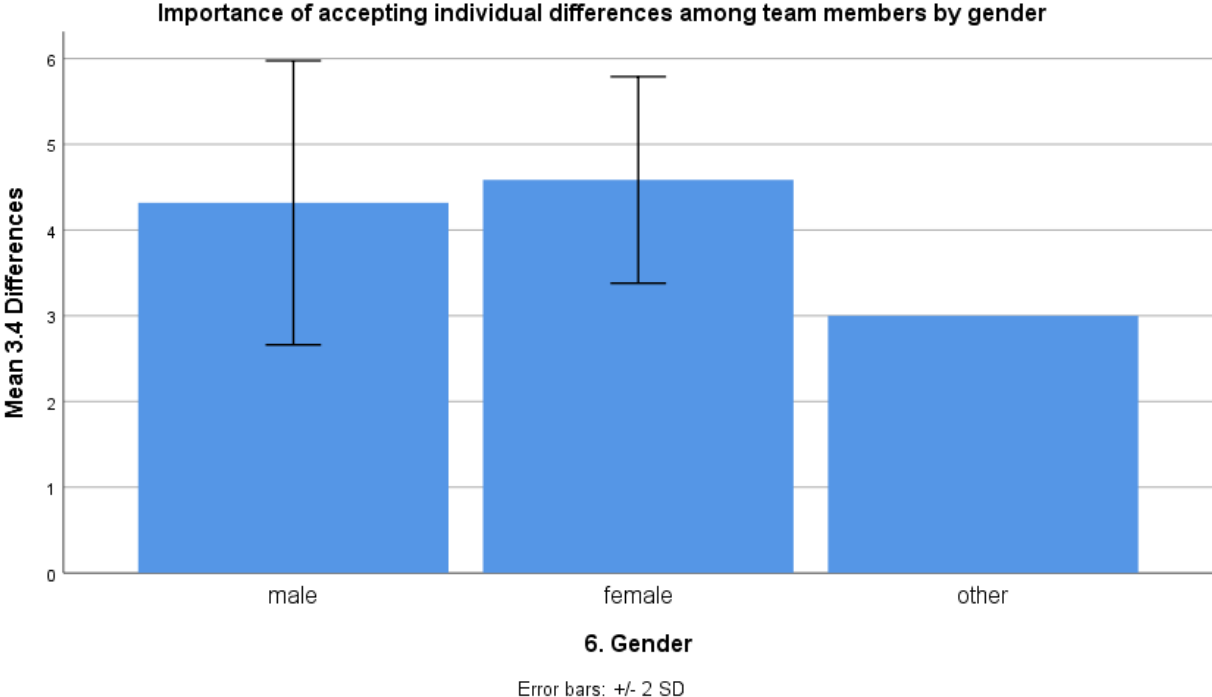


Figure 7.6

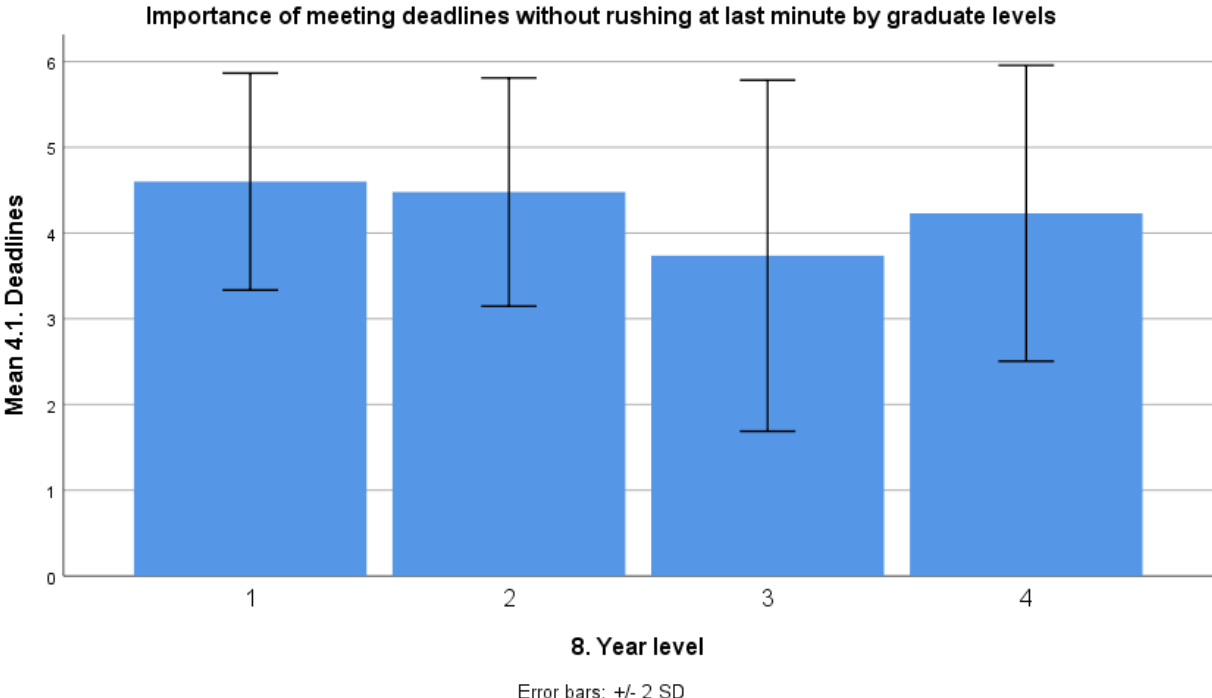


Figure 7.7

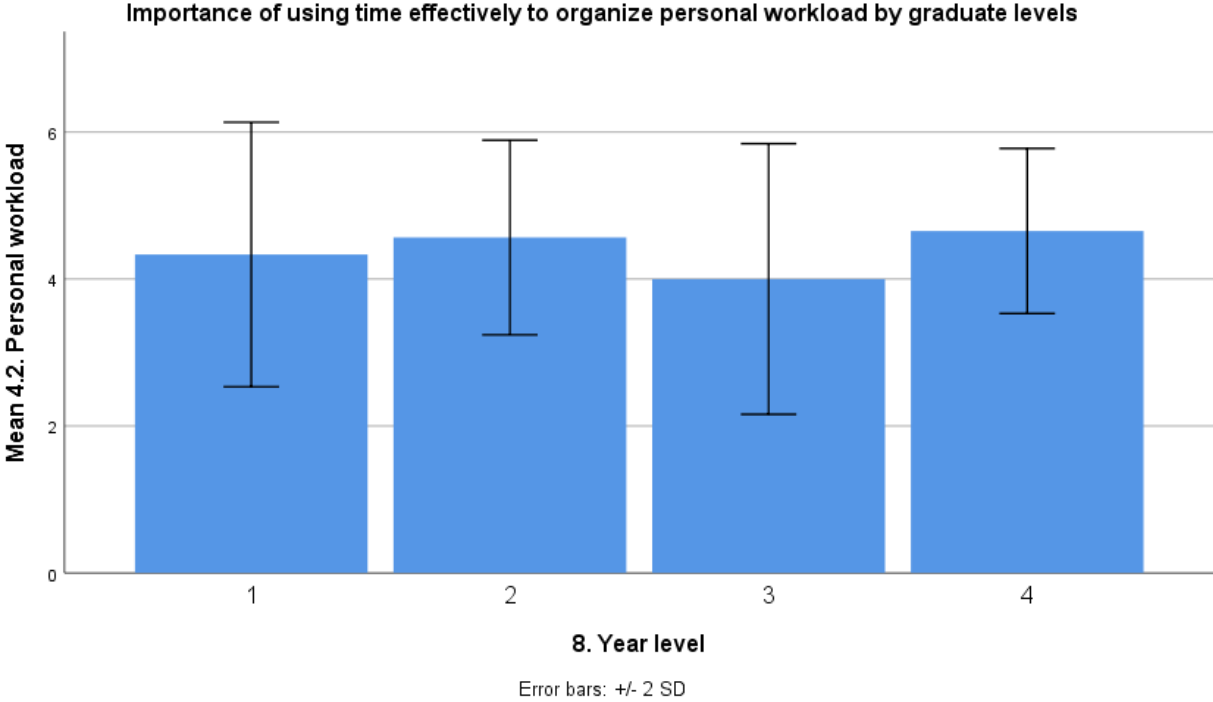


Figure 7.8

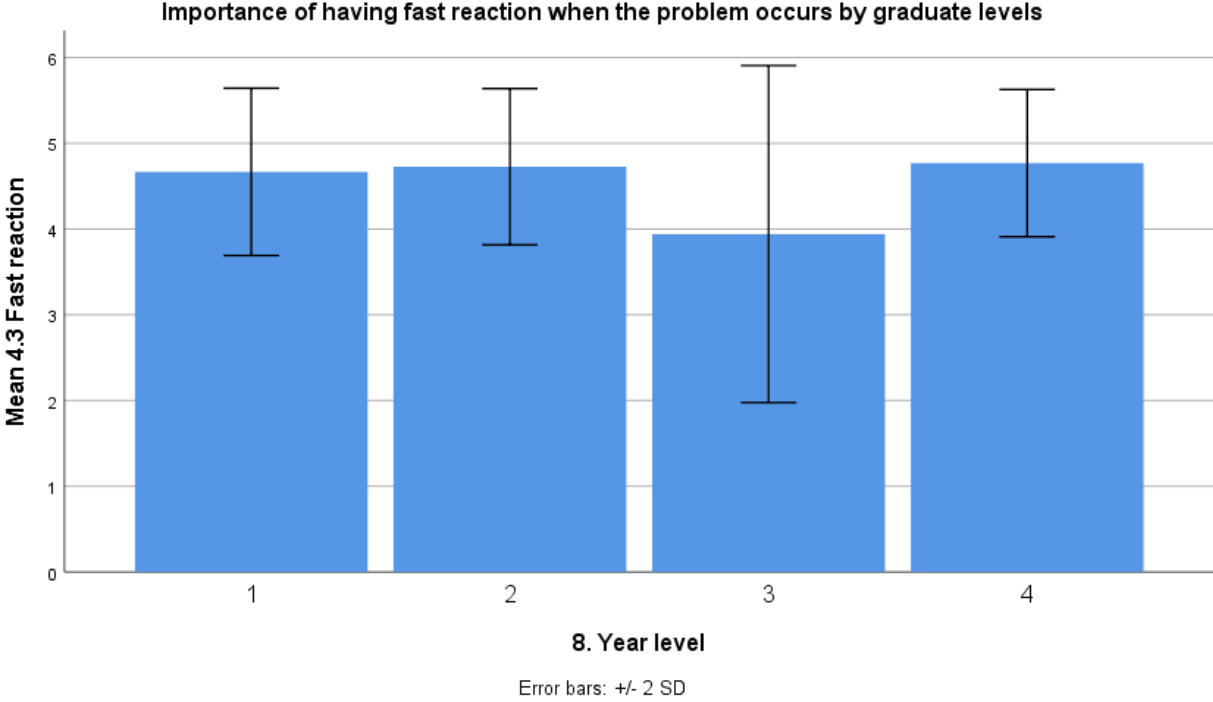


Figure 7.9

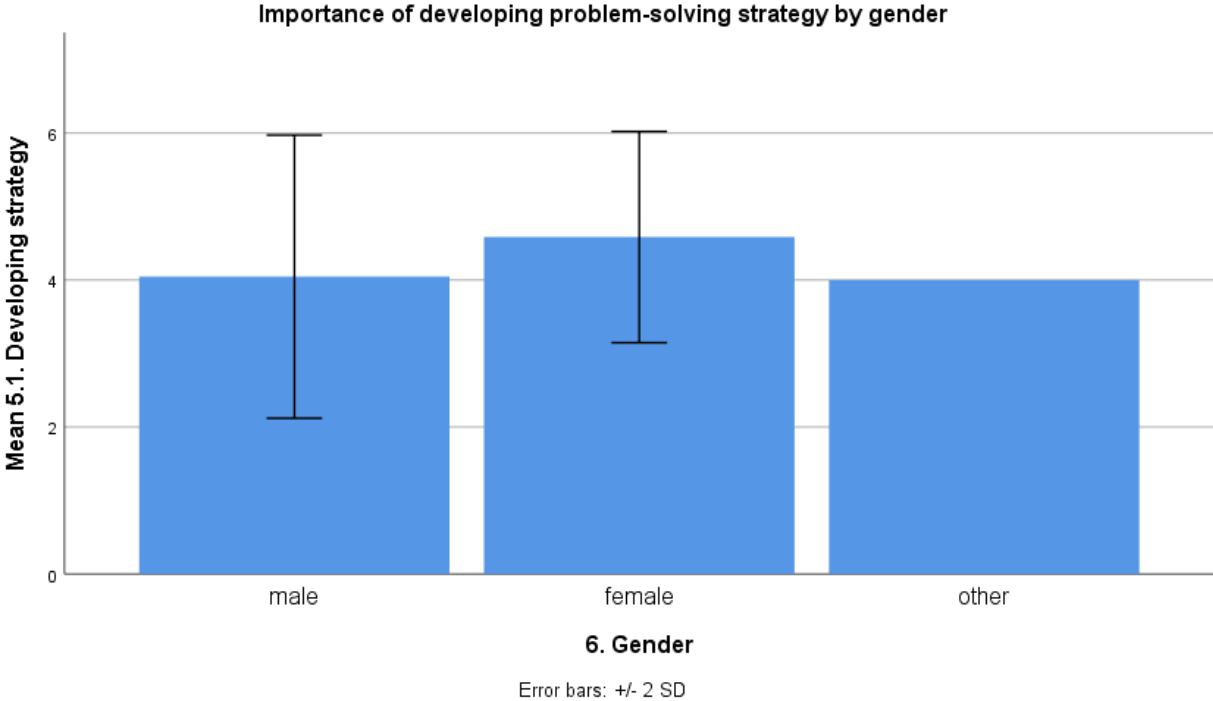


Figure 7.10

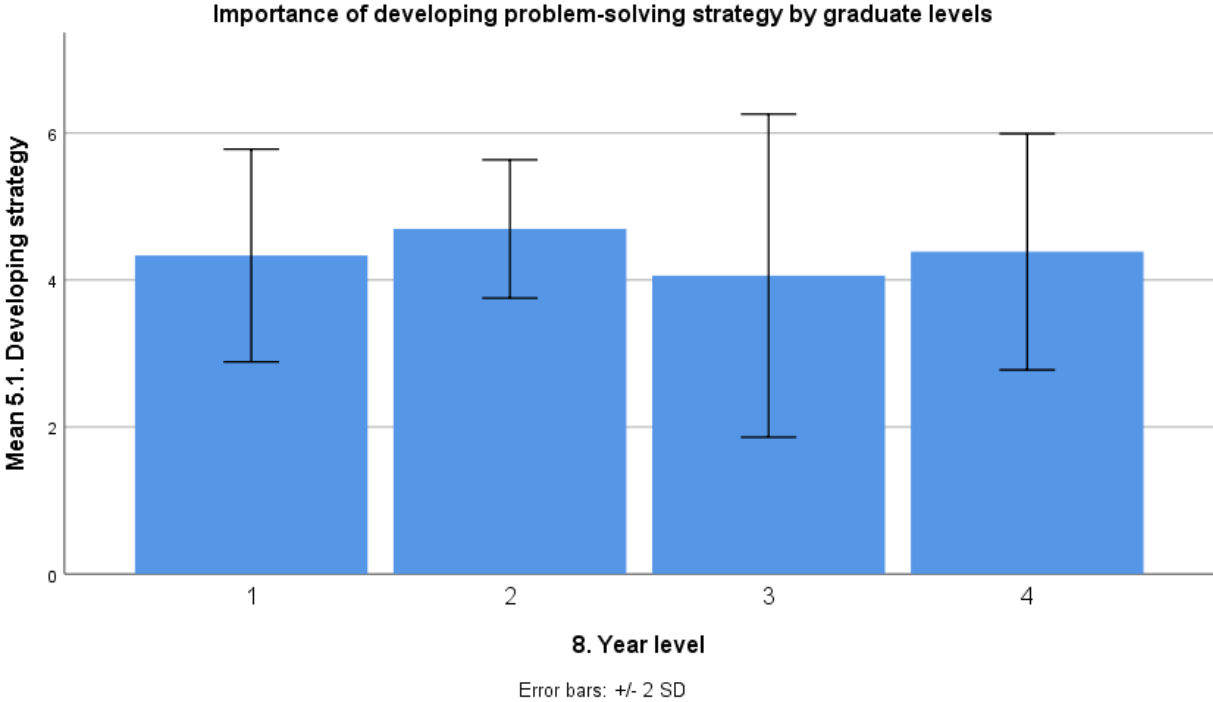


Figure 8

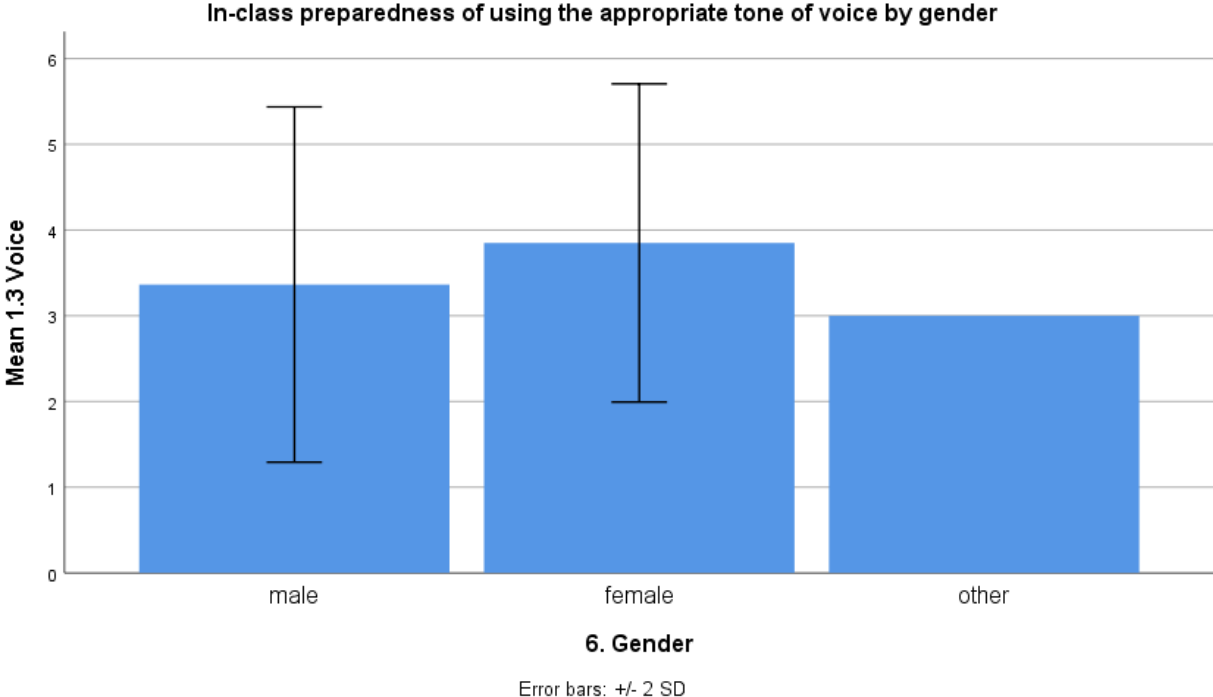


Figure 8.1

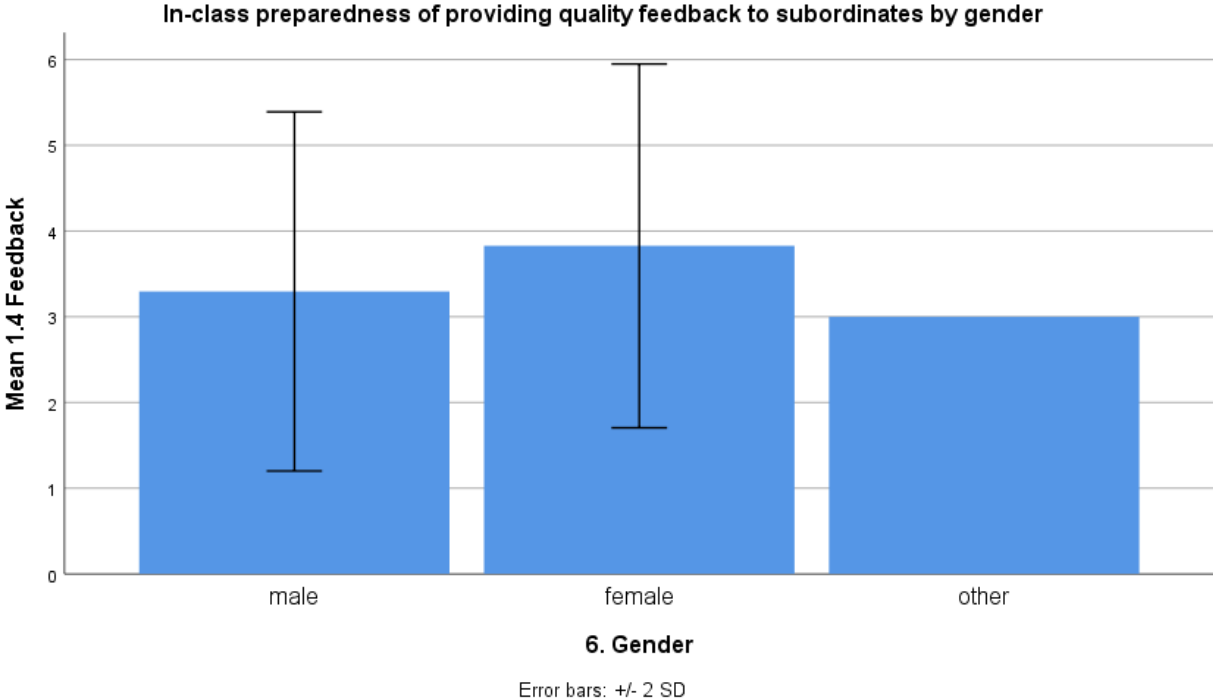


Figure 8.2

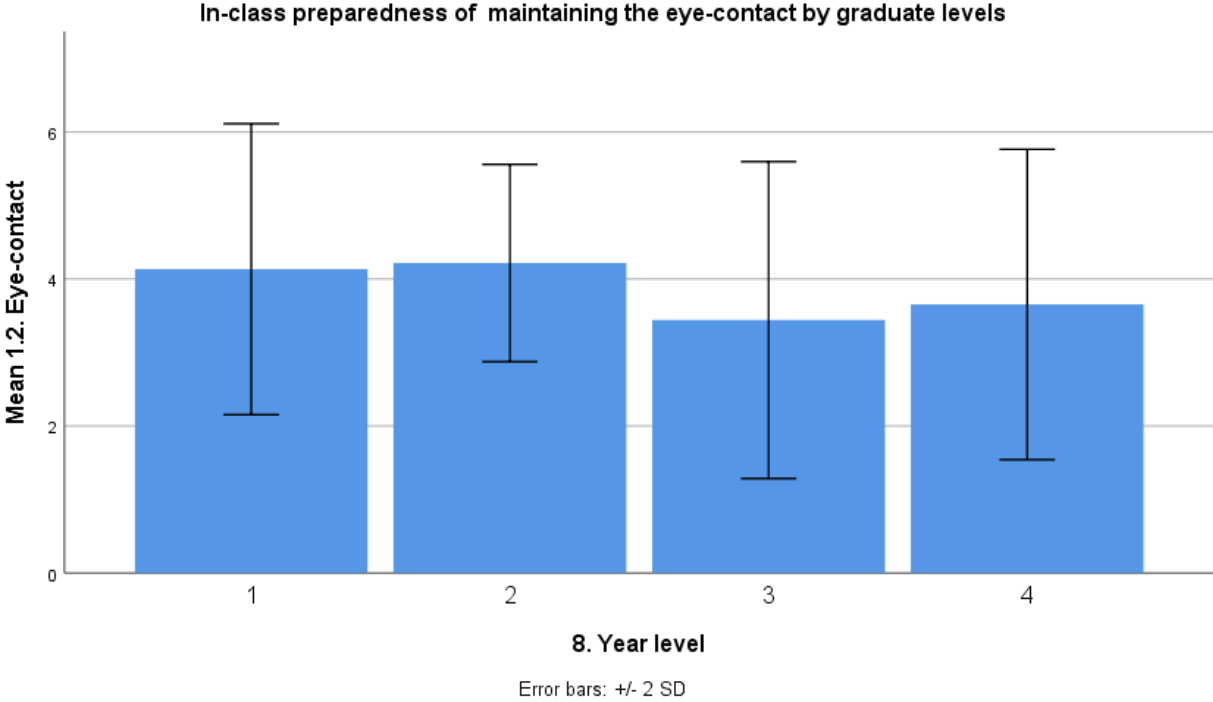


Figure 8.3

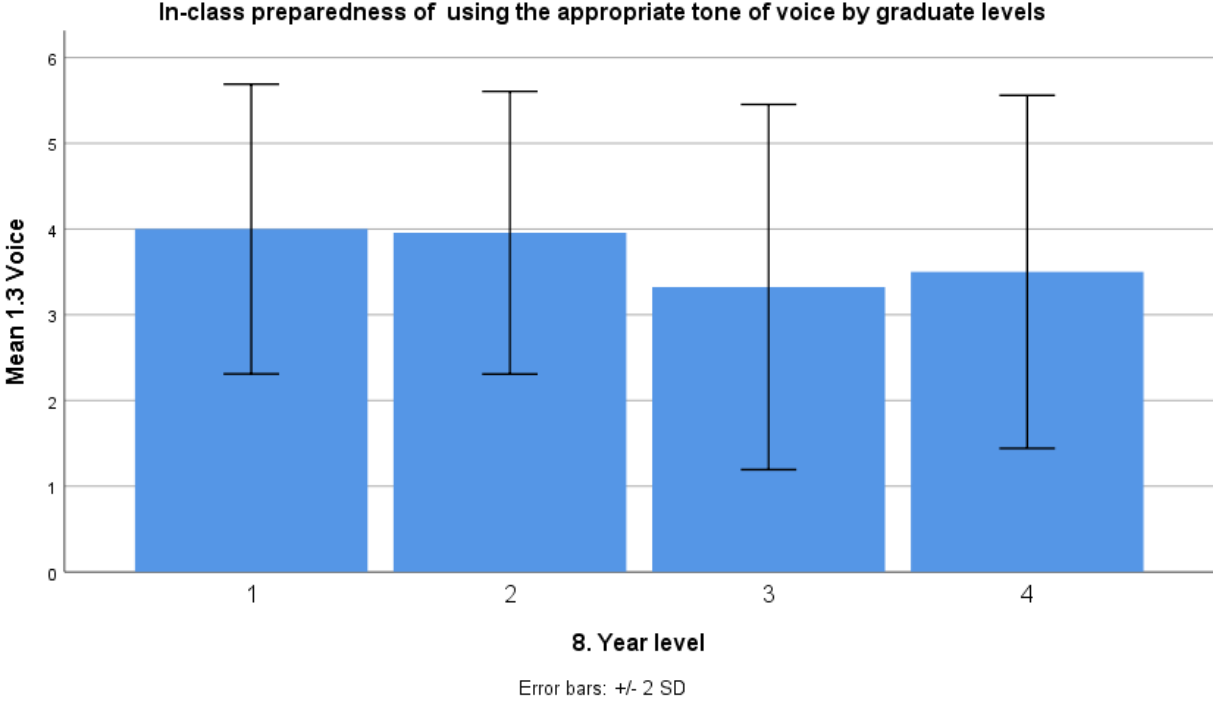


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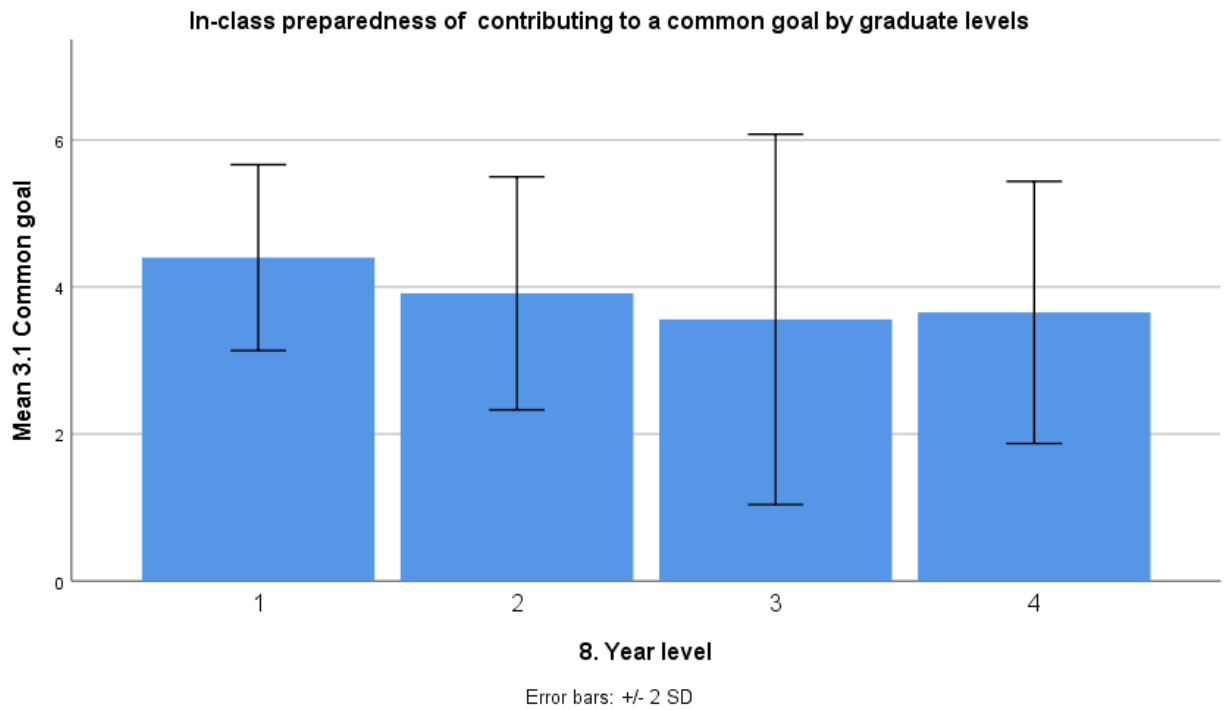


Figure 8.5

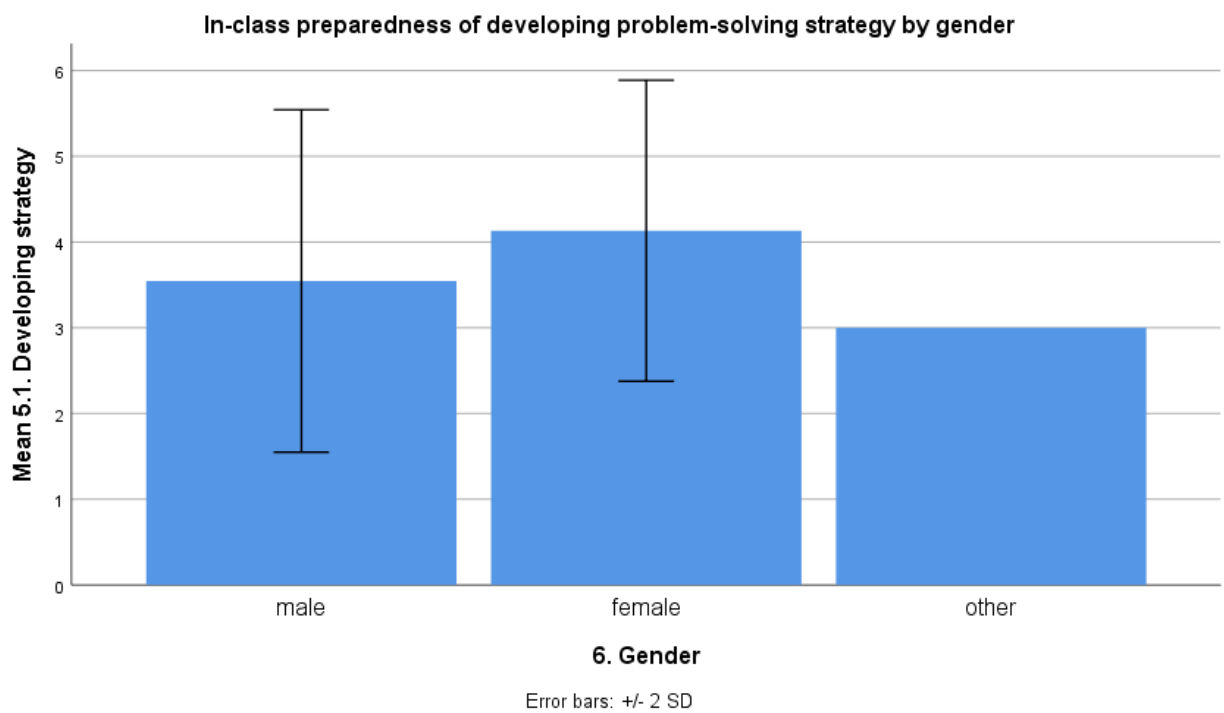




Figure 8.6

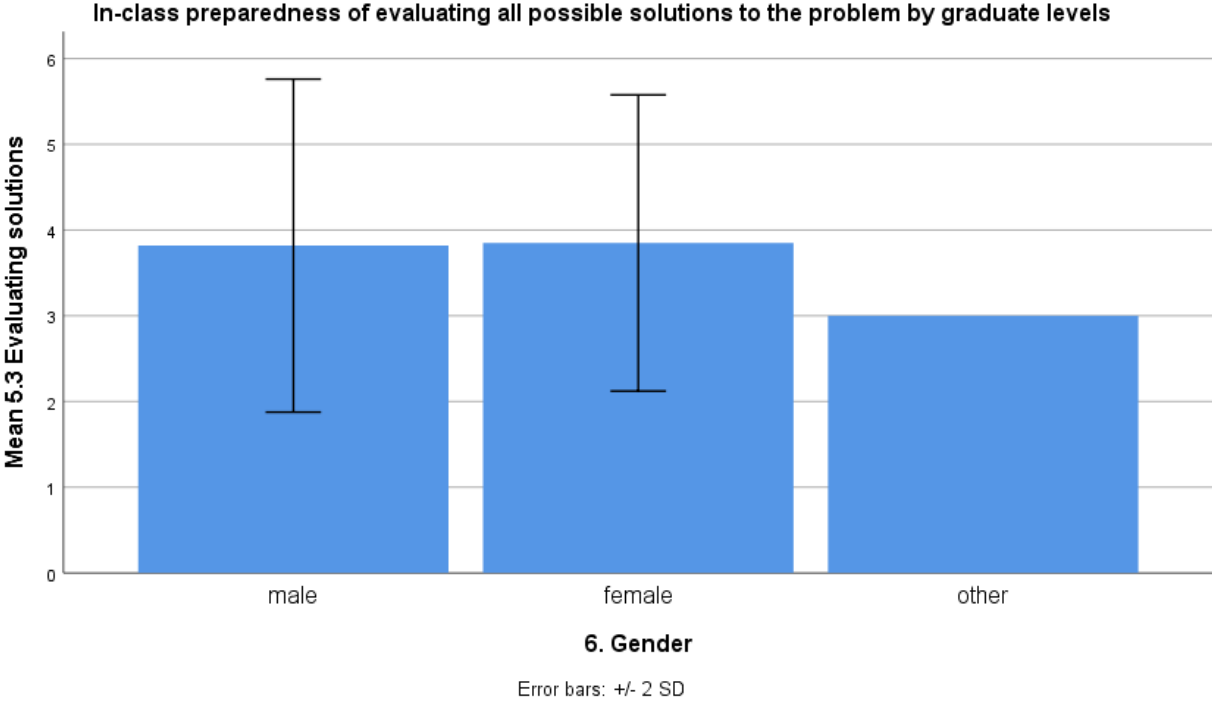


Figure 9

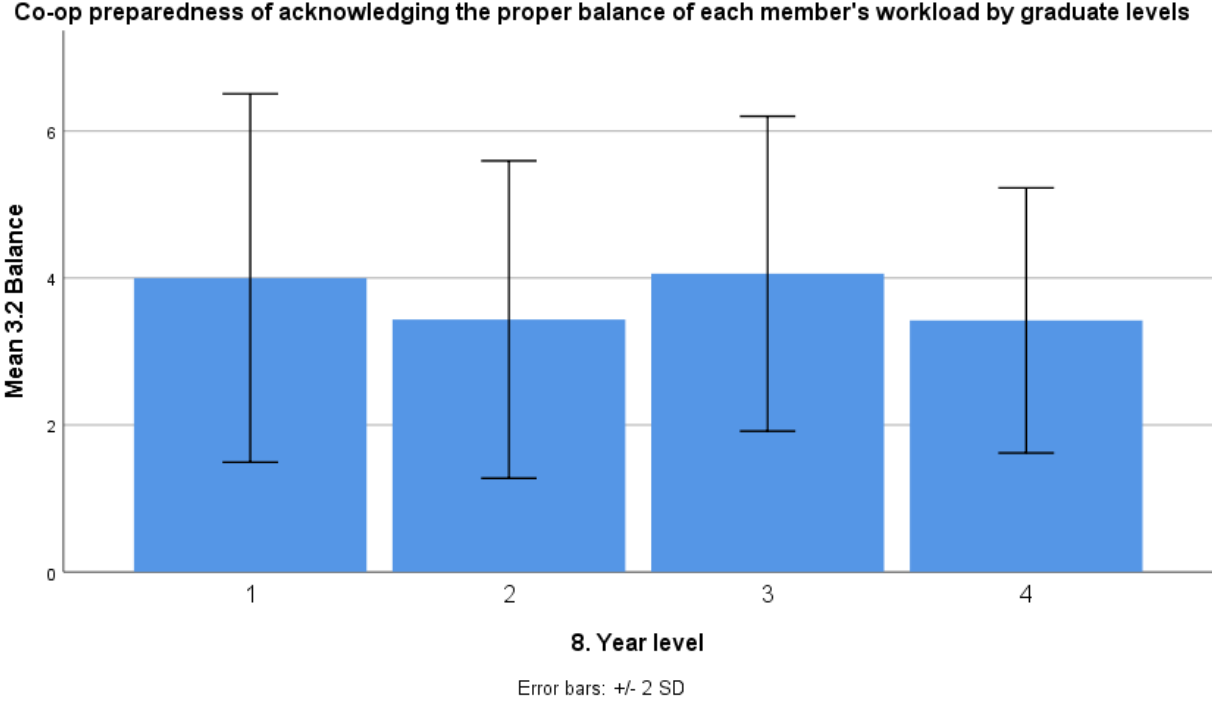


Figure 9.1

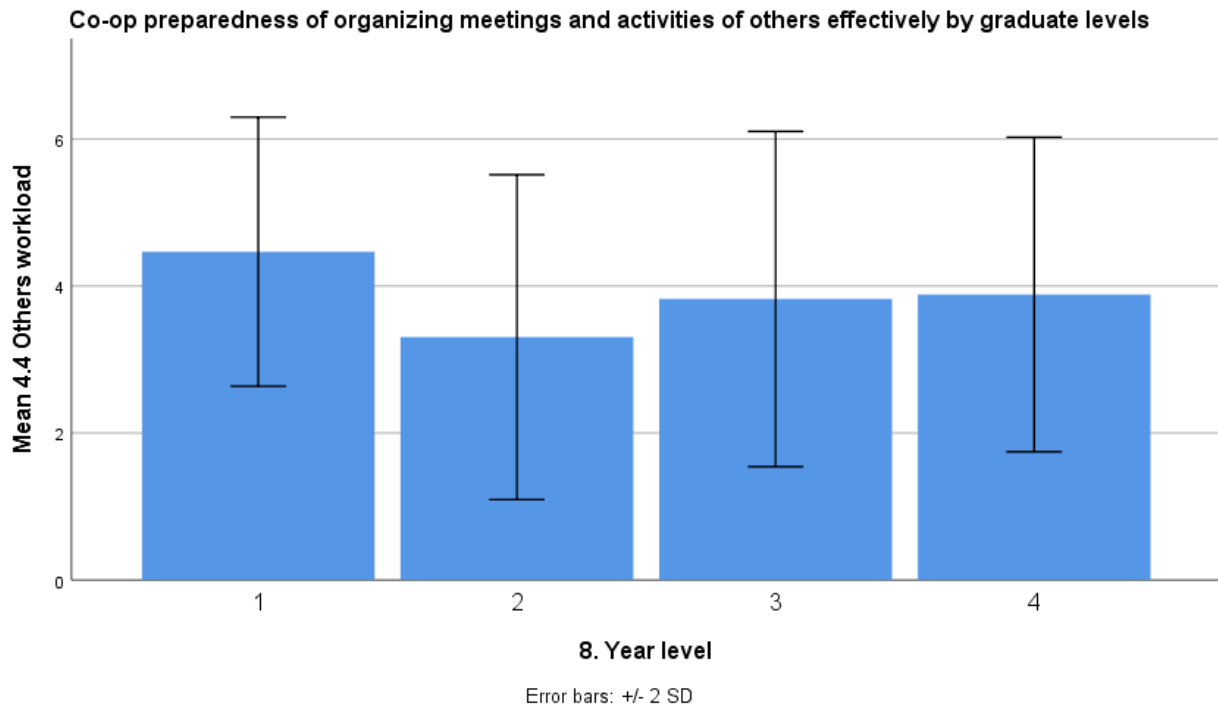
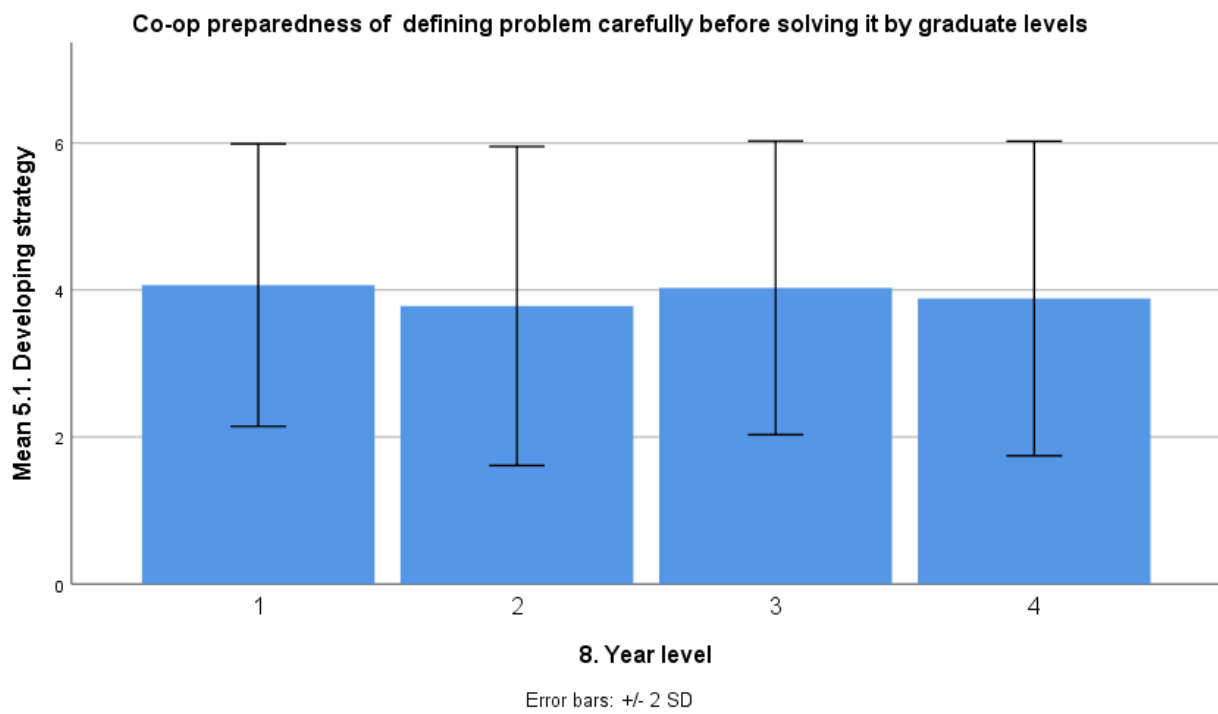
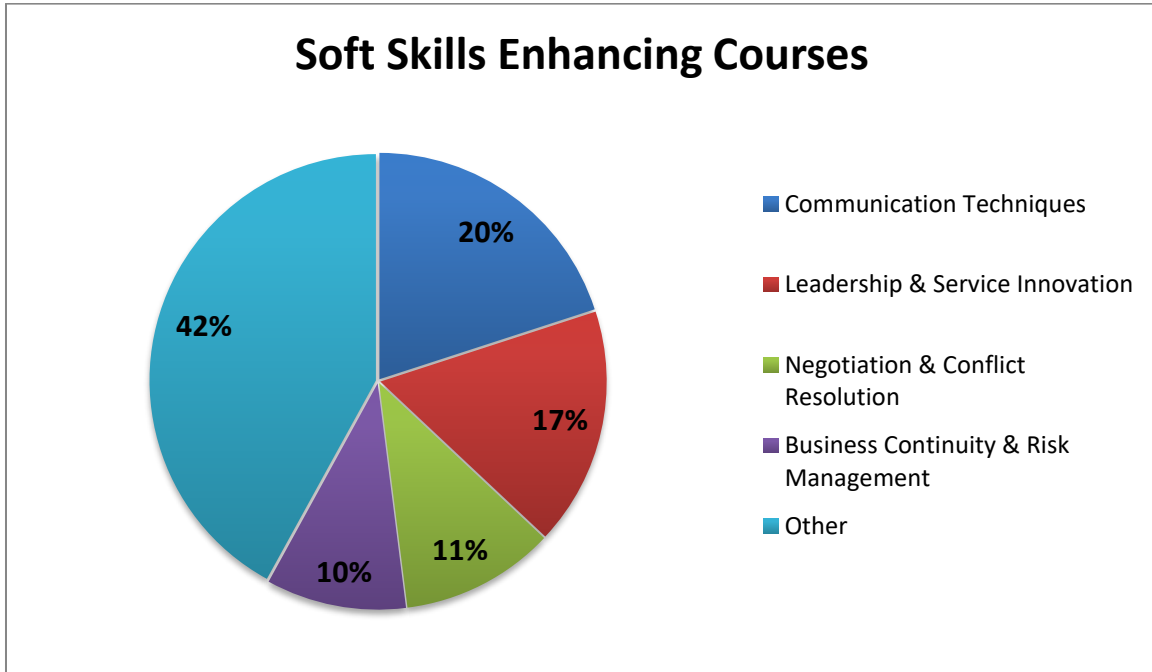


Figure 9.2



**Figure 10 Top courses that were most helpful in enhancing soft skills competence**



**Figure 11 Other soft skills hospitality student consider important, but were not listed in the survey**

