Response to Reviewer #4)

Dear reviewer:

With regard to the reviewer comments and suggestions, we will give targeted answers to each question, and all of revisions will be reflected in the manuscript (highlighted in yellow). Thank you for your careful and patient comments, and instructive recommendations.

I offer the following comments through the eyes of a potential reader.

I found the title of the manuscript interesting since I anticipated learning about the relationship of soft skills with digital competence. Coming out of the current era of COVID and online education, this looked promising.

Comment #1)

I had difficulty understanding what were "soft skills" except for a few brief examples. It would be helpful to have at least one full paragraph on what are "soft skills".

Response to the reviewer:

Authors agree with reviewer comments and the following paragraph was rewritten as follows:

> The specialized literature has been baptizing these skills as 21st century skills [2]. These new capabilities include both specific skills -both technical and digital- and soft skills [3], a combination of skills that has also been referred to as digital competence [4]. Specific skills refer to measurable and job-specific abilities. The latter, soft skills, however, encompass transversal skills, such as those that affect the worker's communicative capacity, critical thinking, collaborative and social skills, and problem-solving abilities In turn, the concept of soft suggests the opposite of hard [5]. Hard skills are those that are developed at a specific level in each of the professions and are composed of particular and eminently technical or methodological contents, such as knowing the structure of a didactic unit, knowing how to operate a machine or knowing the side effects of a medication [6]. On the other hand, soft skills are not specific to a particular family of jobs, but are transversal to all of them. The transfer of Industry 4.0 requirements on the sphere of professional competence profiles while reflecting the need for combining technical and digital skills with soft skills for the 21st century [7]. The professional competences for the 21st century include, but are not limited to, economic competences, project management, digital skills, etc [8].

Comment #2)

It was difficult to see the relationship of "soft skills" and "digital skills" in the manuscript. This needs at least a full paragraph to establish this link. If not, the acquisition of soft skills is irrelevant for effectiveness with digital skills.

Response to the reviewer:

We are grateful for this reviewer's suggestion. Thus, for the sake of clarity, the following sentence was added in the new version of the manuscript.

> For all these reasons, the soft skills are essential for university teachers to reach an optimal level of digital competence, necessary for the development of any training action in a virtual learning environment. The European Commission supports this idea and links, in its Digital Education Action Plan [9], soft skills with digital skills, stating the need for adequate training in Higher Level to achieve a solid development level of soft skills and therefore an adequate level of digital competence. In fact, soft skills, being transversal competencies, nevertheless have an intimate relationship with digital competencies, since they make possible the development and transfer of digital competencies, especially in the long term, to the point that some works already speak of a combined digital-soft competency [10].

Comment #3)

You do an excellent job dividing out the results of self-perceived "soft skills" by the five different groups. That seems to be the focus of the manuscript, not talking about the relationship of soft skills and digital skills.

Response to the reviewer:

To emphasize the relationship between soft skills and digital skills, different analyses linking both competences were included in the Discussion section of the new version of the manuscript.

Comment #4)

The most interesting sentence in the manuscript appears on lines 383 through 385 when you state that students stated that teachers had a low valuation of their digital skills. Now, that is an interesting question to study and then gather student suggestions on how the teachers could improve their digital skills.

Response to the reviewer:

Authors agree with reviewer comments and the first paragraph of Conclusions section has been rewritten as follows:

> **Page 17:**
>
> This paper has found that university teachers from countries with medium or low technical and innovation development (measured through the GII) express high or very high self-concepts on all the soft skills scales. Specialized studies frequently show that students' perceptions of the soft skills (and also the digital competencies) of their teachers are intermediate or low. This discrepancy suggests the need for specific teacher training plans on the use of digital tools in didactic environments and on the development of the different aspects of soft skills. In addition, an interesting line of research would be to study and expose students' suggestions on how teachers could improve their digital skills.

Comment #5)

Maybe the template for this journal only lists the subheadings that were used by the author(s). But, the sections that were missing for me as an interested reader were "recommendations" for improvement of the learning situation, "further research" with suggestions on how others could further investigate this subject (like understanding the student statement identified above), and "limitations" of the research study and caution about generalizing the results.

Response to the reviewer:

Authors agree with reviewer comments. Thus, the Discussion section has been modified following this suggestion. Specifically, some recommendations for universities have been introduced, suggested on the basis of the results obtained in the article. In addition, the final paragraph of the section discusses some limitations of the study and possible future lines of research.

Comment #6)

My final point is that if there is no clear connection between soft skills and digital skills, why care about the acquisition of soft skills and how do those skills (with lots of examples) help the teacher to be more digitally capable.

Response to the reviewer:

Authors agree with reviewer comments. The connection between soft skills and digital skills have been developed in the *Comment #3*