



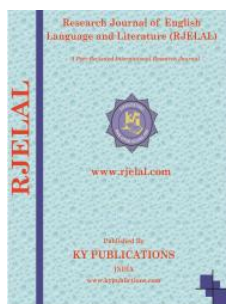
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TEACHING SOFT SKILLS: A NECESSITY IN MODERN ERA

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ABSTRACT

Tell me and I forget
Teach me and I remember
Involve me and I learn
— Benjamin Franklin

Education is the process of facilitating learning or the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and habits. The role of teachers is remarkably great in education system because they groom and edify their students in all aspects. Apart from regular curriculum, teachers need to train their students in communication skills, technical skills, and soft skills today. If the students do not acquire those skills, they cannot seize the opportunities in cut-throat business world today, only with academic credentials. Apparently, there is a great demand for soft skills in this modern and global high-technology era. Therefore, it is indispensable for teachers to focus on soft skills besides regular curriculum because soft skills or life skills are connected to successful career in life. In fact, soft skills, referred to as life skills, play a vital role in our lives especially in our development and success. Soft skills are the personal traits, personal attributes, inherent social cues and communication abilities. Soft skills include attitude, communication, creative thinking, team work, work ethics, networking, decision making, positivity, time management, motivation, problem-solving, flexibility, critical thinking and conflict resolution. So the teachers need to groom their students in soft skills also for their growth and success as well as personality development. *This paper emphasizes the necessity of soft skills for a successful career in terms of personality development and professional growth. Moreover, it explains the two concepts 'soft skills' and 'personality development' and their interdependence.* This research paper focuses on the necessity of developing soft skills in the modern world and teaching of soft skills also. At the same time, it addresses some of the pertinent questions that young people have in their minds today. For this purpose, the relevant data is presented in support of the topic and based on the research findings, some suggestions are made with regard to soft skills in the end.

Key Words: career, globalization, necessity, personality development, soft skills, success, teaching, training.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of education is to make good human beings with skills and expertise, and enlightened human beings can be created by teachers. Similarly, it is applicable to other fields also because one can be successful when one's modus operandi is systematic with skills and prowess. In fact, there is a lot of difference between skilled work and unskilled work. When something is done without any planning and the proper use of skills, it cannot be finished successfully. That is what unskilled work achieves. Due to technological advancements, skilled people get more opportunities now-a-days. Therefore, everything is done with skill yields positive results.

Skill refers to the ability to do something well or cleverly. In other words, skill is nothing but the ability to use one's knowledge efficaciously and readily in execution or performance. Skill is in common parlance with many meanings and numerous synonyms such as ability, competence, knack, aptitude, dexterity and talent. There are two skill sets: soft skills and hard skills. Soft skills are subjective skills that are much harder to quantify whereas hard skills are teachable abilities or skill sets that are easy to quantify. Soft skills can be developed by individuals in order to showcase them at workplaces or interviews and in social life also for personal and professional growth. Hard skills are taught by teachers and they can be applied in some situations.

Let us see the difference between hard skills and soft skills:

Hard skills	Soft skills
<p>Hard skills are commonly defined as the technical skills that are required to carry out a specific job. They are tangible skills that can be easily measured to determine if an employee has the competency to perform the tasks assigned to him. The easiest way to remember hard skills is to think of them as skills that can be easily demonstrated. A simple example of hard skills includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A plumber is able to read blue prints, drawing and specifications to lay out a plumbing system. • A mechanical engineer is able to investigate mechanical failures or unexpected maintenance problems. • A specialist physician is able to diagnose a patient's disease and determine an appropriate medical procedure. 	<p>Soft skills are non-technical skills that allow people to manage themselves and interact with others in a positive manner. Colleges and universities are increasingly recognizing the importance of soft skills - to work efficiently and live life happily. These skills include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • verbal and written communication skills • self-directed learning • creative thinking skills • problem solving skills • conflict resolution skills • time management skills • leadership skills • effective support networking skills • positive attitude • sense of humour • Working as a team

Often, finding employees with outstanding soft skills is more difficult than finding employees with top notch hard skills. For this reason, many companies have started recruiting workers with strong soft skills besides hard skills. Ultimately, the best approach to adopt for career entry and

advancement is that hard and soft skills must work together if an employee is going to set himself apart in the workplace.

In the end of 20th century, 'soft skills' was introduced in educational institutions and training

centres in some countries to train students and employees and later it was spread to other countries. Students and employees are trained predominantly in soft skills because they ignore these skills and give importance to only their academic achievements and hard skills. In this technological era, the importance of soft skills has risen in all walks of life. Mostly, people treat soft skills today as a commodity rather than a necessity. It is wrong to think that soft skills are useful only to succeed in interviews and at workplaces but they are also necessary to live life in all aspects successfully. Peggy Klaus, a noted author, says, *"Soft skills get little respect but they will make or break your career"*.

In business English classrooms, Teachers often focus on teaching hard skills, such as writing reports or running meetings. They do this because it can be challenging for many business students to do these things in English and also because hard skills have an immediate and positive impact on their workdays. Students can benefit from other skills also called soft skills. Soft skills are interpersonal or people skills. They include things like active listening, teamwork, decision-making and influencing skills. Mastering these skills will help students progress more rapidly and become more independent learners. At present, students are trained in soft skills also in English classrooms mostly through business English courses. As English is widely used across the world in education, business, technology and so on, it is essential for students to be trained in soft skills besides hard skills or technical skills in English classrooms.

Literature Review

Barbara Cimatti clearly defines and emphasizes the importance of soft skills in the article *"Definition, Development, Assessment of Soft skills and Their Role for the Quality of Organizations and Enterprises (2016)"*. Manmohan Joshi in his book *"soft skills"* expounds the importance of soft skills in this modern era where these skills are required for humans. This book is a useful reference indeed. Other references also suggest that the importance of soft skills, besides academic achievements, is a need of the hour and people

should be trained in soft skills for their successful career.

The literature review suggests that a majority of the studies on this topic have been done from the perspective of employers and employees and only a limited number of studies have focused on the perceptions and attitudes of students towards soft skills. In addition, a higher percentage of such studies were conducted in America and Europe with different learning environment and work culture than in many Asian countries. It is, therefore, worth exploring the value of soft skills from a new angle and context. The main objective of this study is to investigate the importance of soft skills for education and employment. Some areas covered by this study were: students' perceptions of the value of soft skills, self-efficacy of the level of skills possessed by them, skills needing further improvement, participation in skill development programs, and the role of academic institutions in developing soft skills.

Let us examine the advantages of soft skills, the importance of soft skills in social life, at interviews and workplaces, and how teachers train their students in soft skills in educational institutions or trainers at training centres, in a comprehensive way with relevant examples.

Soft skills and personality development

Most of the organizations require employees with certain abilities to work effectively. These abilities are known as hard skills or technical skills and one has to learn them in educational institutions or training institutes where they receive practical training besides theoretical knowledge. For instance, computer programmers need to learn how to use programming languages and photographers need to understand or learn how to use camera to take photographs.

Today, most organizations recognize that their employees' professional development or professional ethics plays a major role in keeping up their relationships with customers, clients, colleagues, co-workers, suppliers etc because their professional development helps the organizations grow rapidly. In this regard, soft skills, referred to as

life skills, are essential for employees to play a vital role in the growth of organizations. Though there is no clear definition for 'soft skills', generally the term "soft skills" encompasses various skills such as attitude, communication, creative thinking, team work, work ethics, networking, decision making, positivity, time management, motivation, problem-solving, flexibility, critical thinking and conflict resolution. In fact, soft skills are not a replacement for hard skills or technical skills. They are complementary to hard or technical skills to unlock the potential of the employees. Neil Carberry, Director for Employment and Skills at CBI, opines, *"Business is clear that developing the right attitudes and attributes in people – such as resilience, respect, enthusiasm and creativity – is just as important as academic or technical skills. In an ever more competitive jobs market, it is such qualities that will give our youth unimaginable talent and also allow existing employees to progress to higher skilled, better paid role"*. Such is the power of soft skills. People focus on various aspects and develop them in the process of learning soft skills. Let us discuss some of them:

Communicative Skills:

- Ability to deliver idea clearly, effectively and with confidence either orally or in writing
- Ability to practise active listening skills and respond.
- Ability to present clearly and confidently to the audience.
- Ability to use technology during presentation.
- Ability to discuss and arrive at a consensus.
- Ability to communicate with individual from a different cultural background.
- Ability to expand one's own communicative skill.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills

- Ability to identify and analyze the problems in difficult situations and make a right evaluation.

- Ability to expand and improve thinking skills such as explanation, analysis and evaluation.
- Ability to find innovative ideas and look for alternative solutions.
- Ability to think beyond.
- Ability to make a conclusion based on facts and figures.
- Ability to withstand and give full responsibility.
- Ability to understand and accommodate oneself to the varied working environment.

Team Work

- Ability to build a good rapport and interaction with others and work effectively.
- Ability to understand and play the role of a leader and follower alternatively.
- Ability to recognize and respect others' attitude, behavior and beliefs.
- Ability to give contribution to the planning and coordinate group work.

Entrepreneurship skills

- Ability to identify job opportunities.
- Ability to propose business opportunities from time to time.
- Ability to build, explore and seek business opportunities.
- Ability to develop business with innovative ideas.
- Ability to use available technology.
- Ability to interact and convince others.

Professional and moral ethics

- Ability to understand the economy crisis, environment and social cultural aspects professionally.
- Ability to analyze and make problem solving decisions related to ethics.

- Ability to practise ethical attitudes besides having the responsibility towards society.
- Ability to maintain certain professional standards in any circumstances.
- Ability to keep up the moral ethics related to work and social issues.

Leadership Skills

- Ability to develop the knowledge of the basic theories of leadership.
- Ability to lead a project.
- Ability to understand and take turns as a leader and follower alternatively.
- Ability to supervise members of a group.
- Ability to coordinate the team.
- Ability to encourage the team or group at workplaces.

Soft skills enable people to showcase their skills and expose their personalities. Hence, these skills help them in their personality development. Soft skills and personality development are interlinked because one can develop his personality through soft skills or life skills only. Personality development means enhancing and grooming one's outer and inner self to bring about a positive change in one's life. Every human being has a distinct personality that can be polished, refined and developed. It is possible only through life skills. Personality development is gaining more importance day by day because it enables people to have a good impression in the society in which they live. It helps them build relationships and also helps them in career growth. In fact, it is a tool that helps a person to realize his/her capabilities, strengths making him/ her stronger and successful. For personality development, a person has to focus on the following elements:

- Self-awareness
- Goal setting
- Creativity
- Innovation
- Human values

Self – awareness: People can recognize their 'self' – their character, their strengths and weaknesses, desires, likes and dislikes. Self-awareness is one of the prerequisites for effective communication, interpersonal communication and relations.

Goal-setting: Setting goals is a major step on the road to success. There are short - term goals and long - term goals. For short - term goals, a person has to work intensively with a proper planning. Similarly, he has to work with a proper modus operandi to achieve long term goals. Moreover, he has to work patiently until he accomplishes it.

Creativity: Firstly, a person has to understand this world in different ways. Then, he has to think of an idea and approach to convert it into action. Without putting his ideas into action, it cannot be called creativity but it is just imagination. Creativity helps people perceive an idea and think differently.

Innovation: It is an extension of creativity. A person has to think or do anything innovatively to yield desired results and he has to do it quite different from others. Thus, creativity and innovation are crucial for anyone to employ them in an organization's growth.

Human values: Values play a vital role in a person's life. They are a driving force for an individual to develop his or her personality. Values determine what we should do, how we should do and why we should do. According to Dorothy Lee (1959), "We can speak about human values, but we cannot know it directly, we infer value through its expression in behaviour".

SWOT analysis is another concept that has to be taken into consideration by everyone in the process of developing his or her personality. SWOT is an acronym for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. One has to focus on SWOT for personality development by using soft skills. In fact, this analysis helps people in assessing themselves and taking appropriate steps for their progress. Therefore, acquiring and possessing soft skills helps people to succeed in their personal and professional life and also helps in developing their personality in terms of character, self-confidence, creativity and so on.

Soft skills, the employability skills, are interpersonal skills, rose to prominence in the early 1990s. Today, the main concern is on the need and importance of soft skills for students to seize the opportunities in this global market and also for employees to perform well at workplaces. The advantages are many if they acquire soft skills besides hard skills. The following are the some of the advantages:

- Soft skills enhance the leadership skills to improve teamwork, creativity, efficiency and productivity.
- Improve time - management, organizational skills and goal setting skills.
- Develop presentation skills – presentations, project explanations etc.
- Develop brainstorming and problem-solving strategies to increase creativity and collaborative outcomes.
- Enable people to communicate effectively and skillfully with co-workers, employees, clients, customers, friends, family members and so on.
- Enable people to recognize stress symptoms & develop stress deflecting strategies.
- Aid people in developing effective strategies for transition & change.
- Help in personality development.
- Help in personal growth as well as professional growth.
- Help in leading a happy life.

Hence, Soft skills or smart skills help people in their personal or professional growth. Apparently, the advantages are many. If a person develops these skills, he will have a bright career.

Teaching soft skills

Today, the need to train people in soft skills is an accepted fact because the employers mostly

focus on hiring employees who are trained in soft skills and hard skills. So the onus is on teachers and trainers to prepare the students for interviews and also for workplaces by training them in soft skills and hard skills. Mostly, students are not trained in soft skills when compared with hard skills. At the same time, hard skills should not be neglected. In English or business English classrooms, 'soft skills' is a course taught by teachers in colleges and universities and also in training centres by trainers in order to prepare the students for their successful personal and professional development. As English is widely used everywhere across the world, the job opportunities are also for English speaking people. So training in soft skills is a big advantage for young graduates who apply for jobs or start own industries.

Generally teachers and trainers follow three common methods in teaching soft skills. Interactive teaching is the first method among them. Through this, teachers act as instructors and they facilitate exercises that provide opportunities for practice, experience, reinforcement and reflection. In fact, this approach requires skilled instructors and a well-designed curriculum. The second method of teaching soft skills is to hire a trainer in workplace settings. On-the-job training work experience, internships and work-study programmes are all examples of teaching both hard and soft skills. The employers need to hire trainers or instructors to teach these skills for the employees in order to improve their performance. The third method is that teachers focus on teaching soft skills, besides regular curriculum, in the classrooms to improve the soft skills of their students. Thus, students should be encouraged to participate in experiential exercises like simulations and group work or public speaking. This approach can be applied without spending extra money and time. Mostly, this approach is being implanted in the US and in some countries of Europe and Asia. Let us discuss the best practices for teaching soft skills in classrooms:

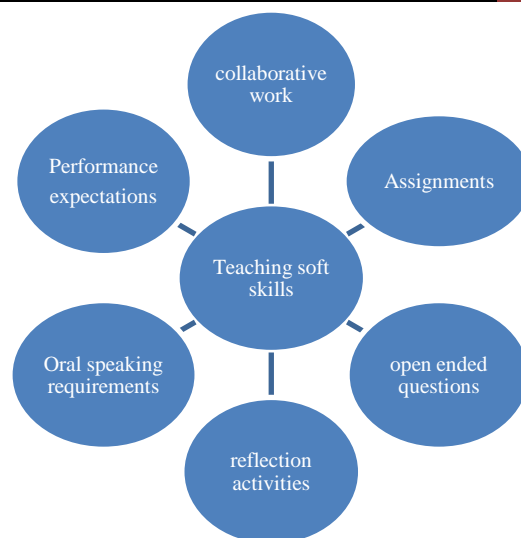


Fig: Best practices for teaching soft skills in classrooms

Teachers and trainers follow best practices in classrooms while teaching soft skills. Firstly, they need to focus on collaborative work. Students make individual progress while working with others for a common goal. Students can learn how to manage the things and learn many things from others. Sometimes, they compete with others in doing the tasks, given by teachers or trainers, in a healthy atmosphere. It is possible only with collaborative learning. Students are trained by teachers or instructors or trainers in classrooms in collaborative learning and it helps them at workplaces later. This is one of the advantages for students to work with others for better results. Experiential learning helps the students in doing assignments and activities based on real life situations, engages them in reflective, data-driven and problem solving with no predetermined right answers. Teachers have to encourage experiential learning in classrooms while teaching soft skills. The instructors or trainers have to introduce open-ended questions in classrooms while teaching soft skills. In this process, students are encouraged to share their ideas, thoughts and feelings with facts in their responses to the questions asked by teachers or peers. Thus, the students are motivated to improve their communication skills. It is clear that the power of learning is in doing an activity. Reflection is the necessary bridge in the learning process in which students are involved in activity-based learning. Such useful activities should be given by teachers in

the classrooms. As a result, students can assess themselves and improve their performance. Public speaking and communication skills are crucial for teachers or trainers because they have to train the students in these skills as a part of soft skills. Students should be encouraged to speak on any topic, participate in group discussions and debates and give presentations. Oral communication skills are a part of soft skills. Teachers and trainers have to prepare their students to perform well at workplaces because the growth of an organization depends on the performance of employees. Even the employers expect the same. It is possible only when the employees work hard by using their skills. Hence, these best practices should be incorporated into classrooms while training the students in soft skills.

Students and employees think that they can have successful career without soft skills. But it is wrong because they lose opportunities if they do not acquire these skills. Let us analyze the surveys conducted in America and Europe regarding the shortage of soft skills among the young graduates and job seekers.

In Deloitte survey conducted in 2011, it was found that more than 600,000 were unfilled in America in manufacturing industries due to skill shortage among the job aspirants. From this survey, it is understood that most of the job seekers are not trained in skills though they are good at academics.

Similarly in Manpower Group Survey (2012) also, approximately 20% of employers in America could not hire employees for their organizations because they did not find the required skills among the job seekers. In fact, it was a big blow for companies as well as job aspirants. Human Resource Management's survey in 2012 disclosed that most of the young employees lacked professional skills and work ethics. Career Builder Survey in 2014 revealed that most of the HR managers had no work ethics and positive attitude.

Surveys in the USA

Deloitte survey (2011)	• more than 600,000 positions in manufacturing went unfilled due to a skill shortage
Manpower Group Survey(2012)	• nearly 20% of employers cited a lack of soft skills as a key reason they couldn't hire needed employees
Human Resource Management(2012)	• professionalism or work ethic is the top applied skill that younger workers lack
Career Builder Survey(2014)	• 2,138 human resource managers: lack of a strong work ethic, a positive attitude etc.

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs report, for example, anticipates that by 2020, a wide range of technical jobs (like health-care practitioners) will require heightened interpersonal skills such as creativity and problem sensitivity to do their everyday work. Thus, the Forum predicts that soft skills will play a key role at workplaces in future. According to an American Management Association (AMA) survey, three in four managers and executives believe critical thinking, communication and collaboration skills will become more important in the future. But most respondents think that their employees' rate at or below average in these skills. Finally, according to an IBM Global C-Suite Study, CEOs rate creativity as the most important leadership quality, beating out management discipline, rigor and even vision. While 79 percent of global CEOs expect greater complexities in the future, however, less than half think their organizations can handle them.

Skill gap causes the problems in countries with the highest youth unemployment

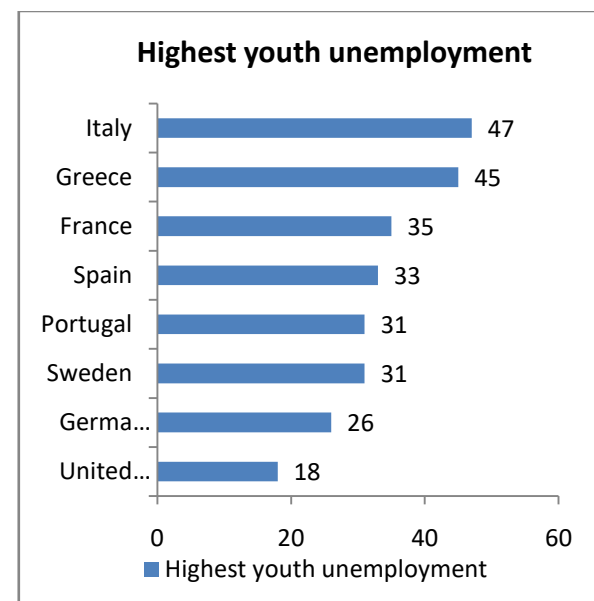


Figure: Skill gaps in different countries (Mc Kinsey report, 2014)

In Europe, Mc Kinsey report (2014) revealed that the skill gap that causes highest unemployment in that region was due to the lack of soft skills.

The findings of this survey are:

1. Skill gap or shortage is one of the main problems among the young workers and job seekers.
2. In the opinion of employers, students are not trained in skills properly in educational institutions and training centres before they step out of those places in search of employment.
3. Still some of European countries have to overcome this problem because the rate of unemployment goes up due to skill gap.
4. To reduce this mismatch, it is necessary to incorporate 'soft skills' as a subject in educational institutions from school level.

Not only America and Europe, Asian and African countries also need to focus on this problem because skill shortage is more even in those countries. In fact, the shortage of skills is one of the hindrances for young people to face the challenges in job market.

Thus, almost all surveys report that soft skills or interpersonal skills are a necessity for young graduates and also important for business people, employers and entrepreneurs to develop their business and marketing. Therefore, teaching soft skills is the need of the hour because millions of young graduates fail in seizing the opportunities across the world. The responsibility is on the shoulders of teachers, trainers and employers to promote the teaching or training of soft skills in educational institutions and training centres in order to make the students and job seekers industry ready. At the same time, they need to train the students morally also. Moreover, soft skills are essential for business people, employers and entrepreneurs to expand their business and marketing.

Conclusion

In this paper, the need and importance of soft skills in modern world where there is a huge demand for skilled people has been discussed. The role of teachers and trainers in teaching soft skills in the process of preparing them for employment and the best practices they follow in classrooms while training the students in soft skills have been emphasized. Moreover, the advantages of soft skills have been explained and the latest surveys on skill shortage have been presented with logical conclusions. In fact, many students feel that their actual soft skills are less than the desired levels. It is also found that communication skills are perceived to be the least important by the students and probably that is why they do not try to improve these skills. It is a matter of concern as many previous studies, investigating competencies sought after by potential employers, reported that communication skills were among the most desired soft skills. Thus there is need to create awareness among the students about the importance of communication skills for career advancement and how to develop and practise such skills.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the importance of soft skills for education and employment. Our education system needs to strive to integrate soft skills into all subjects in order to train students in the skill sets required by

organizations now and in future. This way, students can truly unleash their full potential to create life-affirming solutions for a massively challenging world. Soft skills as a course should be taught in schools and colleges in view of the growing demand for these skills. Moreover, it should be taught not only for career but also for a happy living. At this juncture, it should not be forgotten that soft skills help people maintain their moral standards also.

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