



## Importance of soft skills in teaching and learning

<sup>1</sup> Imtiyaz Ahmad Mir, <sup>2</sup> Dr. VK Saravanan

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor of English, Department of English, Annamalai University, Tamil Nadu, India

### Abstract

The professional world of learning has undergone a tremendous change. Scores of graduates are losing out in the job market because of lack of soft skills. Having mere hard skills are not sufficient to make one's professional life complete, successful and satisfactory. The young generation is having enough qualification and an appreciable percentage of youth are getting good job opportunities also. But the category which is on the average level is just having the dream of getting an employment. Employers' skills and experience are not enough for the ingress and escalation in the corporate world as well as in academics. In spite of such great significance of soft skills, many institutions are reluctant to include soft skills training in the curriculum. The issue of employability of graduates has become very serious and critical. Soft skills are important for employees to retain in their positions as leadership, communication, teambuilding and entrepreneurial interest.

**Keywords:** soft skills, training program, personality development, module, methods

### Introduction

Soft skills are essentially people's skills or personality specific skills. According to Hewitt Sean soft skills are "non-technical, intangible, personality specific skills" which determines an individual's strength as "a leader, listener and negotiator, or as a conflict mediator". Soft skills are the traits and abilities of attitude and behaviour rather than of knowledge or technical aptitude. The Centre for Career Opportunities at Purdue University defines soft skills as "the cluster of personality traits, social graces, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that mark each of us to varying degrees". Their list of soft skills includes work ethic, courtesy, teamwork, self-discipline, self-confidence, conformity to prevailing norms, and language proficiency. Soft skills are different and distinct from Hard Skills. Soft skills are those skills that add more value to the hard skills adorned by an individual. Martin Carole comments that hard skills are more "along the lines of what might appear on your resume" whereas soft skills are "cluster of personality traits, social graces, personal habits, friendliness and optimism." Soft skills are not a substitute for hard or technical skills, but they act as harmonizing skills that serve up to unlock the prospective for highly effective performance in people even with good hard skills.

Technical and job-related skills are a must, but they are not sufficient when it comes to progressing up the ladder. Soft skills play a very important role in this vigorous commercial epoch. Today, there is a huge mass of qualified job seekers existing in the society and the competition within them for job acquisition and job sustainability is becoming tougher. To get an edge over the competitors they are left with no other choice but to add worth to their hard skills with soft skills to exhibit their true potential. If one has got advanced soft skills then definitely he will be able to establish themselves as distinct

amongst other job seekers. Concerning the importance of including soft skills in colleges, Thacker and Yost noted that students require training to be effective team members. Employers often come across that "business graduates lack good team leadership skills". Similarly, according to Knell employers are continually asking for a work force rich in creativity, communication skills and cultural understanding. The National Employers Skills Survey 2003, reported that employers regard shortages in soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and customer focus and responsiveness as far more crucial than hard or technical skills. Poor soft skills like communication skills create a negative impression with employers during the recruitment phase and may exclude a graduate with good technical skills from being selected for employment.

Today lack of competence in soft skill is marked as one of the reasons of poor rate of employability of technical graduates, though it is true that soft skill need to be inculcated at a very young age at home but the role of soft skill training in schools and colleges cannot be ignored. Irrespective of the target group or the institution where it is imparted, soft skills training programs aims to improve a whole range of skills, like assertiveness, negotiation skills, communication skills and the skill to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships. Soft skills are perceived as those capabilities that are inherent in an individual. These competencies exist in every individual to a particular level. But if these skills are not used or if the individual who adorns these skills is unaware of it then that individual will never be able to utilize his / her inherent skills. The aim of any soft skills training program is to remove these blocks or the barriers that prevent the individual from utilizing his/ her skills. Soft skills training will make the individual aware of his / her hidden capabilities and to refine it for the overall development and success of the individual. Everyone

can get benefit from the soft skills training irrespective of the skills they have inherited.

To be more precise objectives of soft skills training program aims to develop effective communication skills, to ensure effective presentation skills, become self-confident individuals by mastering inter-personal, team management, and leadership skills, develop all-round personality with a mature outlook to function effectively in different circumstances. Develop broad career plans, evaluate the employment market, identify the organizations to get good placement, match the job requirements and skill sets. Take part effectively in various selection procedures adopted by the recruiters.

At the Soft Skills training programs training should be imparted to fine-tune the students' attitudes, values, beliefs, motivation, desires, feelings, eagerness to learn, willingness to share and embrace new ideas, goal orientation, flexibility, persuasion, futuristic thinking, diplomacy, and various skill sets of communication, manners, and etiquette so that they will be able to deal with different situations diligently and responsibly. Soft skills strengthen them from within. These skills empower them to understand "who they are" and how best they can come across as competent individuals in any given situation.

The training in soft skills has two parts. One part involves developing attitudes and attributes, and the other part involves fine-tuning communication skills to express attitudes, ideas, and thoughts well. Crucial to successful work is the perfect integration of ideas and attitudes with appropriate communication skills in oral, written, and non-verbal areas. Attitudes and skills are integral to soft skills. Each one influences and complements the other.

Grooming of the students should begin with a preliminary test in the English language to determine their level of competence in the use of English for effective communication both oral and written. The idea is to ensure that students are oriented to understand that a manager's key job is to be able to express himself clearly, correctly, and concisely. To achieve optimum results module has to be made for training programs giving stress on language, communication skills and behavioural skills.

**Business Communication:** covers the following areas: Communications skills, current English usage, debates, language games, situational dialogues, précis writing, essay writing, presentations. (Preparing for effective presentations, presentation for small groups and large groups, marketing and business presentations). **Business Correspondence** (Principles of clear writing, often misused words, applications and requests, routine messages, memos, report writing, organizing meetings, preparation of agenda and minutes, business etiquette, telephone etiquette, e-mail etiquette). As a result the students will soon realize that fluency and command over speaking and writing gives them an edge while interacting with people at all levels.

**Behavioural skills** are an array of skills related to personal growth for efficient functioning constitutes the training. Students are made to realize their strengths and weaknesses so that they are able to grasp the true essence of development. This module covers the following areas: **Psychological Tests:** Aptitude and personality assessment, suggestions for improvement. **Team Skills:** Team building and leadership,

evolution of groups into teams, group dynamics, emergence of leadership, intra-group dynamics, inter-group dynamics, conflict management, inter dependency, assessment of team-based project must include: Pareto's Principle, Parkinson's Laws, Murphy's Laws, Law of Clutter, prioritization, goal setting, effective time management. **Interpersonal Skills:** Negotiations, listening skills, social skills, assertive skills, cross-cultural communications. **Leadership Skills:** Concepts of leadership, leadership styles, insights from great leaders. As a result students realize that punctuality, goal management, collaborative team skills, and listening skills, are important facets of a well-rounded personality. Self-awareness programs enhance the students' personality. These soft skills are enormously valued in business organizations. As employment conditions become tougher, potential recruiters look for personal attributes like attitude and values.

Before the students go through real job interviews, they are made to go through a series of practice sessions on Group discussion and Personal improvement. Feedback is given to the students later for a realistic understanding of industry expectations. It covers the areas such as, **Selection Process:** Overview of selection process, practice of psychological tests, effective resume writing, dealing with placement consultants and head hunters, references – how to get effective references from past and current employers.

However, the employers should involve themselves Group Discussions, Concepts and Practice, Effective interview techniques, mock interviews, stress interviews, review and feedback. As a result Students aspire to obtain fulfilling and rewarding campus placements. How the students fare in the campus placement interviews depends on how well they are able to internalize the personality development techniques. If they internalize the techniques thoroughly, they have a good chance of getting great placements.

The teaching methods in the soft skills training should include lectures, projects, role plays, quizzes, and various other participatory sessions. The emphasis will be on learning by doing. Since the method of training is experiential and highly interactive, the students imbibe the skills and attributes in a gradual and subtle way over the duration of the program. The students will not only learn the skills and attributes but also internalize them over a period of time.

Internalization ensures that the skills and attributes become part of the students' nature. Subtle changes are bound to occur in their behaviour and outlook, and these will make them more self-assured and confident. Moreover, the behaviour changes will be gradual and natural and will not appear artificial or put on. Thus, the changes in them will be genuine and positive.

The Soft Skills training program is a credit course and the evaluation of the students takes place on a continuous basis. Active participation in activities, interest displayed by the students in acquiring the necessary attributes and skills and the commitment shown by them to improve in terms of attitudes are the main criteria for evaluation. The effectiveness of the training session is enhanced through a two-way feedback. Wherever necessary, the trainer gives feedback to individual students on their performance and to the class in general. In turn, the students also give feedback on the training sessions. They are encouraged to give suggestions regarding the content and the delivery of the training sessions so that improvements

can be made in the modules from time to time if necessary. The counsellors will also give a feedback to the students on their strengths and the areas where development is needed.

Effective communication and interpersonal skills are crucial to increase employment opportunities and to compete successfully in the business environment. The real key to the effectiveness of professionals is their ability to put their domain knowledge into effective practice. In this context soft skills has a crucial role to play. To enhance or to hone soft skill traits among students some training modules has to be made at college level. To conclude, the soft skills program is about enabling and empowerment. With these training programs students' have a smooth transition from aspiring students to young successful managers. Therefore this paper throw light on the need of soft skills training programs in colleges and workplaces and need to reduce this lacunae that is existing in the students by introducing such training programs. The paper also puts forward some suggestions for making above initiatives more effective for developing students fully equipped with relevant soft skills.

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