

SIGNIFICANCE OF SOFT SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

This report seeks to explore the skill gap that exists between what Indian graduates have and what employers require, with particular emphasis on the growing relevance of soft skills in the labour market today. The challenge of finding suitable employment is common among the most fresh graduates as the traditional education system encourages hard skills and technical knowledge.

Research highlights their increasing importance in education and the workplace, with scholars like Dr Jessy John and others emphasizing the role of these skills in employability and career advancement. Studies show that employers prioritize soft skills over technical expertise, and graduates with these skills are better prepared to meet the demands of modern workplaces. The incorporation of soft skills training in education is recommended to bridge the gap between academic output and job market requirements.

However, the ability to relate and communicate is commonly lacking. The findings of the investigation show that employers are selecting candidates with both soft and hard skills, which calls for the practical application of soft skills in learning institutions. The report covers the alignment of educational systems to the needs of the industry with the help of a literature review and presents various models, including but not limited to team teaching, internships, and workshops. These are surprising since it appears that most of the institutions are slowly changing their ways of including soft skills in the very programs in which they are needed to meet the demands of the working sector. The report further argues that incorporating both hard and soft skills is important for improving employability in India and resolving the issue of skill deficit, hence calling for educational reforms that support the development of graduates in all aspects.

Keywords- mentorship, employability, soft-skills, hard-skills

1. INTRODUCTION

Abilities that humanity developed throughout their evolution can be subdivided into character and behavioural traits, what is usually colloquially referred to as communication skills or soft skills. They have a particularly great impact on how well a person performs his or her job responsibilities as well as how they relate with others. These skills include such personal and social characteristics of an individual which make them capable of conversing, working and resolving issues in different situations. Such competencies include but are not restricted to communication, teamwork, emotional management, adaptability, leadership skills, time management and critical analysis of given information. There are soft skills, for instance, which are required in almost all interactive situations rather than being given to a particular task as with technical skills. Due to this reason, they are vital for ensuring personal goals and professional success. Given that contemporary work settings emphasize the aforementioned skills, they have become a necessity for improving performance and nurturing a conducive environment within an organization. Nonetheless, and for reasons that are yet unclear, such skills have been found to be in much demand but considered to be optional, with little scope for training in them compared to training in hard skills such as programming.

‘Hard skills’ are abilities or knowledge that can be taught with measurable outcomes. These skills are often practical and learnt in schools, technical programs, apprenticeships or on-the-job training. Some of the hard skills include coding languages, data science, art, learning a new language, handling machines, and finance designing. In comparison to soft skills which focus more on the sociability, hard skills are task-based and role-focused which are significantly important for job performance and progression in most occupations.

Soft skills are important not only in the professional sphere but in everyday life as well. Personal relationships inevitably face conflicts. Some of these ‘soft’ skills require patience, empathy, and good communication in effective parenting. These skills are used by the parents to nurture, discipline, and sometimes to bring peace amongst the warring factions. Disputes are resolved diplomatically because soft skills such as emotional intelligence assist in strengthening relationships. Parents also use soft skills such as negotiation and active listening to help their children resolve conflicts, which is why these skills are so important. When parents model these skills, they help develop their children’s social and emotional skills as well as nurture the family unit, preparing the children for societal interactions in the future.

Emotional intelligence is important and helps in mental wellness by enabling persons to control stress, express feelings and avail themselves of assistance when necessary. A social network is a type of network that is created between people.

It includes persons engaging and communicating with each other. It is helpful to have soft skills before engaging in small talk, making friends or even keeping friends. We require soft skills in our day-to-day life in many ways.

Most organizations expect their workforce to be already conversant as to how to behave in a given office environment, an expectation that is, more often than not, invalid. With constant changes in the job market, it is no longer enough to be well-versed on how to do only one's job. Employers are starting to recognize that these employable skills, soft skills, are just as important as technical skills. Also, in industries where customer interaction is crucial, a lack of soft skills such as empathy and active listening can lead to poor customer service and diminished customer satisfaction. This problem highlights the need for targeted soft skills training to improve client interactions and overall service quality.

Here, it is discussed about the mismatch between industry needs and industry needs. At present, there is a huge chasm between the level of knowledge gained by students and what is

required from them in the economic activities in India. Most of the students complete their courses but fail to get jobs since the aspirations of the employers differ from what is offered by the education system. These systems focus on the technical aspect so much that the graduates are not prepared for the interaction level of working environments that face them. Though possessing good educational qualifications and appropriate technical knowledge, a huge percentage of engineering degree holders in India have difficulties competing favourably in written tests, performance tests, group interviews and even one-on-one interviews during the on-campus or off-campus recruitments that they attend. This lack of relationship between what the students learn in school and what is needed in the workplace results in poor job performance and even stagnation in career growth, which is a clear indicator that there is an urgent need to enhance the pedagogy of teaching soft skills in the existing content.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2009, Dr Jessy John analyzed the impact of soft skills in education and the workplace and compared the concepts to hard skills. Various scholars have given varied definitions of soft skills. These include such things as how one communicates, how one solves problems, how decisions are made, and the ability to lead. These contribute to the growth of an individual as well as success in one's profession; James Heckman, an award-winning scholar, went ahead to say that soft skills predict one's success in the world. In the review, there is a growing concern about soft skills support within education from day one, that is, at the primary school level. Project work, teamwork, seminars, and other forms of cooperative learning are some examples of familiarisation with such skills. Soft skills have several advantages, including self-awareness, better relations, and greater chances of getting a job. Such capabilities are becoming more important with the incorporation of these mechanical capabilities in the modern workplace due to which employers seek for potential employees who possess good soft skills as such people are good at teamwork, communication, and flexibility. The text states that soft skills are important not only in career but also in an individual's general well-being and socializing. In view of all, the incorporation of soft skills training within educational systems is recommended in order to equip people with the skills necessary to cope with the current times.

According to Dr. Swati Vasantrao Chavan (2019), one of the main aspects that relate to forming a successful team is the so-called soft skills set. Soft skills are personal character traits that enhance interactions or relationships within a given environment. These skills are indispensable when one is in a work environment and members of staff interact, and even for an individual in the course of his/her professional life, such factors aid his/her success. Other studies show that when employees possess additional skills, they will actively climb the career ladder and 94% of the employers claim that they look for this type of skills in the people rather than in years of working experience.

When it comes to modern office premises, typical examples would include working in a team, understanding the essence of active listening and proper verbal expression. Serving customers is also about interpersonal relationships, for nowadays people are calling for more and more human interaction as they are presented with many options. Looking towards the future and with regard to growing trends in automation, the opposite holds true. By the year 2030, due to the increased automation of processes, a lot of jobs will make use of soft skills rather than hard skills or the products of hard work. Moreover, concepts like emotions and empathy fall under soft skills, and these are not only hard to replicate but also highly valued. These can be and most often are noted as a previously taught skill. Perhaps, since these skills pertain to behaviors and persons rather than techniques, they can be hard to master.

In order to be successful in the rapidly changing environment, one has to be an effective leader, but more importantly, one has to learn how to cultivate soft skills (Al Asefer and Zainal Abidin, 2021).

As a result, the narrative adds that graduate's employability is enhanced not only by hard skills but increasingly by soft skills. There has always been research on nothing but technical knowledge only, but in modern corporations, these skills have altered as they instead target non-technical abilities i.e. communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking which are vital in ensuring success in an organization. There is a skills gap as a good number of graduates do

not possess the skills that employers desire and this has led to a high rate of unemployment amongst the fresh graduates. According to studies, graduates who possess soft skills have a high chances of survival in the job market. Therefore, it has been ethically and professionally stated that soft skills training should become a component of the curriculum of educational institutions so as to fit the market demand and increase the employability of graduates. This change is significant not only in regard to achieving one's personal goals but it is also in the building of a competitive workforce in the changing landscape of Industry, where due to complexities within organizations, both technical skills and people skills are essential for innovation. In conclusion, and in general development of soft skills is considered an important area of expense for those graduates who would like to build a successful career.

According to Prachi Tiwari (2022), the ability to communicate and build relationships is one of the primary soft skills that help employability of one's in colleges and universities in India. Education is needed for social and economic development especially when the one country region is declaring itself as World's youngest population by 2025. There has been an upsurge in the demand for skills especially those regarded as soft skills like communication, collaboration, and critical thinking, as a result of the current knowledge-driven economy. The research notes that high competition makes it difficult for most graduates to get jobs even though they are qualified, especially with factors like inflation making it worse, thus pointing to a gap between what the education system is producing and the job market. To this effect, the study seeks to outline the significant workplace soft skills and their influence on productivity and employee performance. It also emphasizes teamwork and satisfaction at work as being highly dependent on both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Tasks identified are, reviewing the state of various higher education the education system in India, exploring soft skills from the perspective of businesses, and looking into the impact of these skills on one's professional growth. It is this research that brings to light the issue that both education and business discourse should shift towards soft skills acquisition to enhance employment rates as well as respond to the changing needs of the market.

In their article in the year 2024, Dr Rashmi Kaushik and Dr Jaya Sinsinwar noted soft skills are important for effective functioning at the workplace, identifying four areas, which include: positive attitude, communication skills, ability to work with others, and management of time. These skills are a part of career advancement, whereby employees are able to go through difficulties, interact with others and help in the development of the organization. Therefore, it is important to acquire these skills for any favourable outcome in work for a long time to come. A positive attitude is associated with personal satisfaction and career enhancement, which creates energy and a sense of togetherness that encourages members of the team. Team members should communicate and cultivate relationships, which is another reason why communication skills are important.

Meaningful communication is not limited to oral and auditory processes but also encapsulates body language and gestures which are very important in motivating and interacting effectively with others. Where such teamwork is concerned, it is understood in this case as being one facet that

brings together many different people and ideas in order to achieve a common goal. Everyone has a part to play in assuring that the balance in cooperation is maintained and this synergy in itself is productive since it propels achievement in work performance and career growth. Finally, time management is considered a functional ability that aims at the accomplishment of objectives and targets within a specific time frame that is externally imposed. It helps people manage what tasks to do, helps avoid stress and enhances effectiveness. Time management is emphasized in organizations to ensure that time is well utilized in order to achieve set targets and organizational goals.

3. RESULT ANALYSIS

Integrating Education and Industry for Workforce Readiness:

In many cases, educational institutions prefer imparting knowledge more so that it helps in developing those skills among students who are out of touch with the reality of their employers. Increasingly, employers have been in search of candidates who are "plug and play" and do not require any training. The present Indian education system is also fraught with many issues, including overlearning the subject content rather than understanding it and a lack of space for imagination. As business and technology are evolving quickly, it is imperative that academia and the vertical industry work together to solve this problem. One of the ways this problem can be dealt with is by engaging in team teaching when teachers integrate knowledge with the help of experts from the industry. In such a model, the teachers teach theoretical aspects, and the practical aspects are handled by industry practitioners. This model enables students to learn the relationship between theory and practice, which gives them an insight into what is expected in the work environment and prepares them for the job market.

Equipping Graduates with Both Soft and Hard Skills for Success:

In the current scenario, employers tend to look for the right mix of soft and hard skills. Soft skills include emotional intelligence, the ability to lead, communication and the ability to relate well with other people and work together as a

team, while hard skills include occupational skills, professional expertise and theoretical knowledge. For the newest graduates in today's workforce, there must be equal preparation and training in both. While a lot of the graduates possess very good capabilities in hard skills, they tend to lose the fight for many employment positions because of the lack of soft skills, which are important for working with other people. When it comes to a graduate with excellent possession of technical skills, an employer will not ignore the soft skill factors, rather, they may either train the individual to help develop these skills or look elsewhere for candidates who possess both these skills. Hence, for this reason, there is a need for every graduate to ensure that they do not develop only their technical capacities and then neglect their soft skills as this will lower their chances of getting employment.

The Critical Need for Interpersonal Skills in the Workplace:

Many graduates find it difficult to manage interpersonal relations and communication in a business setting. These skills form the core of any workplace structure, whether it is for project development, conflict resolution or a simple daily chat. Interpersonal skills mean all the skills that people require for interaction, communication and working with other people. It is not only about talking but also about listening to and understanding people properly and relating to them.

When these skills are exercised, better and healthier associations are developed both socially and at work. While these skills are in demand, few educational systems have embraced the incorporation of these skills in their curricula. This is often based on the assumption that with time, interpersonal relationships would get better as the person socialises with others. This can, however, prove counterproductive as a majority of graduates find themselves ill-equipped to face the work environment.

The Need for Soft Skills Training in Campus Placement Preparation:

One of the primary issues that students encounter during campus placement drives is the absence of soft skills. Most of the students have barely any acquaintance with the ability to communicate, which disallows them to react well even in situations where they can give the right answers. This can be addressed, however, through aid from both colleges and the recruitment mechanism of the organisations, which can assist the students in enhancing their soft skills. Mock group discussions and interviews can be introduced as a measure to achieve the same. Another fundamental thing is to form peer groups whereby members can relate to each other, criticism can be exchanged, and skill improvement enhancement on soft skills can be accomplished. Employers today require fresh graduates to be equipped with both technical and soft skills. Hence, the graduates are expected to train themselves regarding soft skills way in advance, given that most educational institutions focus on hard skills and theoretical aspects. There are various other ways that students can practice their soft skills and improve them. These include workshops, seminars, mentoring and coaching, and placing oneself in the industry by networking and participating in group work. Most people believe that such skills are learned in high schools, where very few people may do so because of effective separation, lack of attention, lack of interest or because they went to schools that were predominantly low in regional languages and culture. In addition, the soft skill article cannot be confined to attending a couple of training sessions towards the last year or near the campus induction as is the responded frequently by conversion schools; rather, such concepts require enhancement and reinforcement over periods through gradual implementation and practical application, as well as regular maintenance.

The Importance of Soft Skills and Real-World Experience:

Inevitably, job settings come with various complicated aspects and factors that interact effectively, such as understanding and managing people's relations and their behaviour and including politics in the work environment. Understanding how to use soft skills in different situations is not very easy, and this challenge is mostly evident, especially in college students when they are in internships. There is no better way a person can learn or prepare himself/herself concerning a certain field of work than by gaining hands-on practice, which internships and job shadowing offer an insight into how a certain profession performs. Nevertheless, some of the high school goers chase only academics and lose such chances or the other type is in quest of following a cause and does not know where to even start. There is also a steady rise in focus on boosting the college and career readiness of school teen students, and as a result, this has led to schools working in partnerships with businesses in schools. Additionally, educators have come to discover that students tend to be more engaged in the learning process as long as they can appreciate the applicability of their lessons in the outside world. Adjusting to communication practices in a given industry is not easy because of many reasons. For instance, every other industry has its language, has its business etiquette and is accustomed to different forms of business communication that outsiders are not used to. Practitioners must be able to modify content depending on the recipient, be able to speak at different speeds and pitches and be aware of different ways of providing feedback. On top of all that, one also has to be emotionally intelligent, especially when it comes to dealing with people and settling disputes. Most fresh graduates may find themselves in a fix and unable to cope with the harsh realities of employment, which calls for a disposition to learn and improve communication in real-life situations.

4. DISCUSSION ON THE RESULTS

The widening chasm between the set of skills acquired by the graduates and the set of competencies that employers require, especially in soft skills, is one of the major difficulties in the job market today. A good number of graduates are oriented more towards technical knowledge and have the right qualifications. However, they are not successful in finding jobs due to a lack of skills in communication, coordination, management, and others that can be termed as soft skills, which are a necessity in any occupation. This is because most employers now seek those who can work with people and within teams, enhancing their chances of getting employed. Most educational institutions have historically concentrated on teaching hard skills, and in most cases, excluding soft skills development, which renders many graduates ill-prepared for the challenges of real-world work environments. The situation calls for educational restructuring as a matter of urgency, which will ensure the inculcation of soft skills development in the curricula and also promote the collaboration of institutions and the industry for better training of students in line with contemporary human resource demands.

Unexpected Findings

Earlier employers concentrated more on the hard skills for the workplace, and now it is gradually focussing equally on soft skills too. Students have also started to prepare themselves for the workplace over time. The unexpected thing is that even institutions have started to include soft skills in their curricula, which is very useful for students to attend placements. This ensures that all students learn more about the importance of soft skills in real life so that they do not tend to take it lethargically. Students are facing issues in applying soft skills in real time, which gets resolved only with time.

Scope for Further Research

The contradiction between academia and real-world work provides great scope for future inquiry. This consists, among other things, of researching effective models of soft skills training within the course, the employer's opinions on soft skills and the skills that need to be developed and, lastly, internships and their contribution to the ability to get a job. Furthermore, it is worth considering the differences between regions concerning skills gaps and how education and training can be enhanced by utilising technology. In addition, researching the role of soft skills in mentorship programs, as well as policies requiring assessment of the industry alignment of curriculum, will go a long way in bridging this divide. All in all, these studies may improve the quality of graduates in light of the requirements of contemporary society.

5. CONCLUSION

The study reveals that there is a gnawing gap between the education system and the requirements of employers due to the trend of traditional education equipping students with skills that are of little or no importance to employers, especially soft skills. Graduates may have the required technical knowledge, but their employment is greatly restricted due to insufficiency in interpersonal, communication and intra-teamwork skills. Such cases demonstrate the very fitness in aspiring attainment of soft skills training as a course in educational institutions without leaving behind any hard skills training. When social and especially industry engagement is promoted among the institutions, better training programs that meet the needs of society polished out are possible, and they are more useful. These transformations will not only improve the students' employability but also help to narrow the existing skill mismatch and develop a skilled workforce. The results indicate that for any training system to be effective in producing ready graduates, soft and hard skills should be incorporated in equal measures in the training of any individual.

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