

## **Soft Skills and Productivity and Creativity of Secondary Students**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In an article, *The Growing Importance of Soft Skills*, (web source) Smith, Todd pointed out that soft skills has become indispensable to organisations as businesses are becoming less autocratic and the sense of community is becoming more important; thereby stressing that organisations are becoming more people-focused. These developments have changed the way people look at attitude, particularly relating to how one communicates and behaves, so as to ensure understanding and rapport building between people and organisations; to contribute to the smooth functioning at workplace as it will with business relationships, and consequently lead to economic growth too.

### **Introduction**

Soft skill is a mixture of literary essentials of Literature, Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology and so on. From them, one can learn the following:

- a) Inferential skills: from Philosophy
- b) Empathy: from Literature and Psychology
- c) Awareness: from oriental philosophy
- d) Transaction skills: Psychology, and Humanities and Social Sciences

Thus it is appropriate to speak of some of the essential attributes of soft skills as given below.

1. Awareness and Introspection
2. Emotional Intelligence and Positive Self-esteem
3. Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Understanding
4. Empathy and Communication Skills
5. Intuition and Inferential Ability

Soft skills represent one of the fundamental prerequisites of the modern day times and is therefore a necessity for anyone who seeks a job as it is also for those who want to thrive,

while in it. Consequent to the societal changes and work-world demands, a great challenge has been put on the youth of today to learn and develop necessary skills and approaches for survival. Furthermore, this has necessitated a change in perspective of how individuals and educational institutions look at employability. This has led many to see education, skills and positive traits and attributes as forces that facilitate sustainability, growth in personality and development of character. Therefore, a concern with education needs be one that encourages positive development of the emotional, intellectual, spiritual and physical capacities in the learning and growth of every individual. A primary nature of education needs to therefore be one that encourages teachers and students to come together in an environment that nourishes, nurtures, and promotes learning and creativity.

### **Need of Soft Skills in Education**

The demand for the 21<sup>st</sup> century life-skills has changed the way education is viewed today. This demand has called for a revamp in the education curriculum as it has with the new demands on teachers. Therefore, education service is in the process of change, with reforms regarding the various possible effective approaches to education being discussed widely all over the world. Given the above, questions such as „What is the purpose of education? What skills and knowledge should education seek to empower students with? How can these skills and abilities be taught to students? Should all streams of study be concerned with the same objective?“ are some thoughts that can be asked on education. Difficult as these questions may be to answer, they offer an opportunity for deep contemplation; questioning the prevailing education system, thereby leading to open and productive discussions and consequently onto necessary changes in education.

By and large, the purpose of education is to disseminate information to students. However, today, its purpose is also extended to perform the dual function of:

- i) Enabling sustainability after education and
- ii) Nurturing minds, to encourage learners into becoming better human beings.

### Need and Significance of the Study:

Although soft skills is considered important in all walks of life, soft skills, as is read and understood, is generally confined to the management and corporate perspective and world, thereby limiting the scope of soft skills. Furthermore, although several research on the importance and promotion of soft skills have been carried out, the problem is that, being inspired by the spirit of targets, efficiency and output, the end result of soft skills as a study has, to a great extent, been laid out as skills devoid of spontaneity, deeper emotions and its intrinsic implications, as opposed to the values that can be drawn out from other disciplines.

Similarly, while many studies have been carried out on the skills needed in education, most studies have not focused enough on, nor given comprehensive views on soft skills that need to be adopted by people in the teaching profession as well as in education. Likewise, the works do not explain as to why and how soft skills can be nurtured in students, teachers and those in education.

### Literature Review:

The literature review attempts to present a systematic study focused on works across the globe, emphasising the need of soft skills touching the domains of education. One of the main reasons for reviewing the selected works was so as to highlight the urgent, if not strong call to educational institutions across disciplines, to give space to soft skills in academic curriculum; and that it is now considered the responsibility of those in education system to wake up to the call of educating and nurturing students with the necessary contemporary skills.

<sup>1</sup> The primary objectives of education are

- i. To enable sustainability
- ii. To nurture and create caring, feeling and contributing human beings

Richards, Deborah, & Marrone, Mauricio (2014), through an industry based survey of the Information and Communication Technology industry in Australia, identified skills considered important to the present Business Analyst. Their study noted that soft skills was considered most important skill for the Business Analyst, apart from Business, Technical and Green skills.

Thus, they suggested that soft skills should be an essential part of the curriculum of the undergraduate and postgraduate studies.

#### Limitations of the Study:

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1. The study intended to list out the various definitions and categorisations given on soft skills, so as to have a strong point on which to start. However, due to inability to get more relevant materials, the study had to contend with whatever material and resource was available at the time.
2. The study could have taken into account soft skills awareness in educational institutions, to see how far it has affected the selection criteria during recruitment. Similarly, it could have taken into account student awareness of soft skills. This would have given a clear understanding of how this awareness has impacted education, particularly in Nagaland. Nonetheless, this would have made the study too comprehensive to be completed within the time frame of the study.
3. It would have been interesting if the study also looked into soft skills from the local Naga<sup>2</sup> context. However, as with the above limitation, this would have made the study too vast to be completed within the given time frame. Nonetheless, there is a lot of scope for such studies.
4. There is a lot of connection one can make between English literature and soft skills. Although that was an earlier intention, this too would have stretched the study.
5. Last but not the least, a more in-depth and detailed study on soft skills can be carried out, drawing from philosophy and psychology.

Citing references from various works, Lee, Li-Tze, & Lee, Tien-Tse (2011) contended that soft skills constitutes good communication skill, ability to solve problems, adaptability, teamwork, and so on, thereby highlighting the importance of soft skills in work place.

Likewise, Mamun, Al. (2012) referred to soft skills as the abilities that contribute to professional effectiveness and career growth.

Thus, as pointed out by Pinkowsk, Malgorzata., & Lent , Bogdan (2011), writers have chosen to use the term soft skills to describe as one, all or fractions of the aspects that fall under the domain of soft skills. They further noted that with no clear definition of soft skills, writers have chosen to use varied expressions to define soft skills such as the ones given below.

Soft factors (Caupin et al, 1999; Wohlin, 2005), Interpersonal skills (Gillard, 2009; PMI, 2004), People skills (Flannes, 2004), Personal skills (Murch, 2001), Social skills (Alam et al, 2010), Critical skills (Lee et al, 1995), Human skills (Pant & Baroudi, 2008), Key skills (Simpson, 2006)

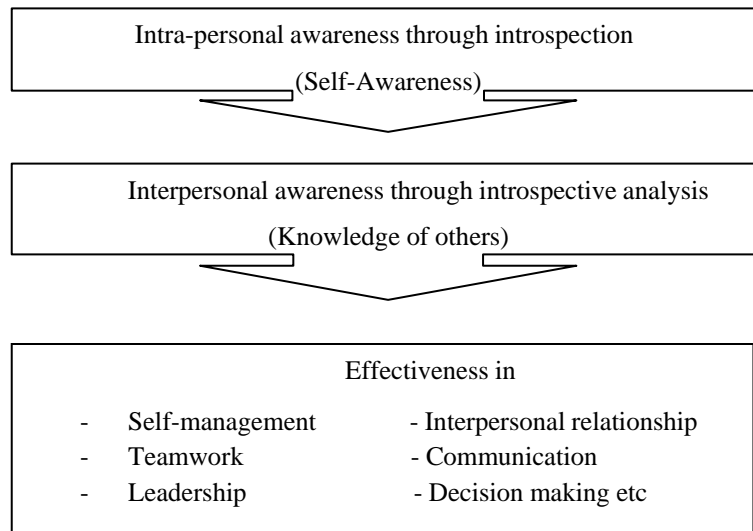
With no clear or definite understanding about soft skills, several writers have chosen to categorise soft skills into separate set of skills to mean a certain component of soft skills. Such classification is seen in the work of Suciu, M.C., & Lacatus, M. L. (2014). Although they did not give a definition of soft skills, they provided a comprehensive inventory of the 21st century competences and skills as:

Creativity / innovation; critical thinking; information literacy; problem solving; decision making; flexibility and adaptability; learning to learn; research and inquiry; communication; initiative and self direction; productivity; leadership and responsibility; collaboration; ICT operations and concepts; digital citizenship; media literacy (Suciu, & Lacatus, 2014, 164).

Agarwal1, Neetima, & Ahuja, Vandana (2014) defined soft skills as the sets of personal and interpersonal attributes which are not necessarily quantifiable and measurable, while management consultant Challa, Ram Phani (web source) defined soft skills as personal traits and skills. The consultant further listed and discussed sixty (60) sets of soft skills considered important and therefore sought by employers during recruitment (*Annexure1*).

Interpersonal skills can be developed only when one has a positive outlook towards oneself and others. Thus, the possession of self-awareness enables an individual in predicting other's dispositional behaviours. This view is reflective of Clinical philosopher Alexander's (2012) observation, that one has better understanding of the other person, based on the pattern of behaviour through observation. In much the same way, a broader definition of personal intelligence was given by Kelly, K., & Moon, S. (1998), wherein they referred to personal talents as aptitudes that are basically intrapersonal talent that help one to take constructive action with respect to both people and tasks, thus reiterating the importance of self-awareness for self-development

The given diagram explains the importance of awareness for personal effectiveness.



**Communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Confronting Cultural Differences:** The *Partnership for 21st Century Skills* built a structure, delineating twenty-first century skills as ability to analyse, communicate, work in a team, have knowledge of global affairs, be technology savvy and economic literate. In the same way, some recent and relevant ten skills employers desire in today's work-place are brought out in the work of (Archer, Will, & Davison, Jess, 2008; Ramlall, & Ramlall, 2014), with the former study identifying communication and team-working skills as the most important skills while recruiting new graduates.

Indeed, most literature emphasising on what employers want from young graduates have highlighted the importance of communication competency in young graduates. CEO of Aetna, Mark Bertolini (web source), lamented:

I've seen many an actuary and many an engineer who are brilliant, but they fail in their ability to communicate or commercialise an idea because they can't relate to the people they're dealing with. ([www.businessinsider.in/11](http://www.businessinsider.in/11))

Emotions, Intellect and Communication:

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Biologically, the humans are endowed with certain sets of emotions, feelings, instincts and attitude; attitude that can be either positive or negative. Humans can be self-centered beings, seeking for spaces which fulfil their need for acknowledgement. Thus, one observes that across cultures, gender or age, one generally considers oneself important - if not to others, at least to oneself; perhaps an inkling towards self-esteem. Everyman is, in that sense, the other man, and this fact needs to be acknowledged. This need for recognition can range from the regular to that of the extreme. However, in general, human beings seek for approval; to be acknowledged and understood as it is to be accepted, and the signal to such a need is given either verbally or non-verbally. Therefore, when in any capacity, an individual is acknowledged, a sense of self-worth is built in him. This resonates Rogers', C.R. (1975) view, that when people are accepted and valued, they tend to develop a more caring attitude toward themselves, and this actually leads to self-respect and thereby self-confidence too.

### **Awareness and Self-Development:**

As individuals, one aspires for self-development. Self-development comes from a keen concern to train and nurture behaviour that lead to growth in behavioural nourishment. It involves awareness of oneself and that of others, and since, as brought out by Goleman (1995), outcome of teaching at the lower level of cognitive development is thought to be immense, early childhood is often considered the right time for nurturing its basic foundations. Given this, it is worth introducing the basic foundation of soft skills from the elementary stage of development. Even otherwise, one can learn at a later stage of life as put forward by O'Doherty, E. F. (1968), that one's response to experiences, other than that which is primitive or inherited by genes is learned and developed over a period of time too.

### **Professionalism through Communication:**

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There is indeed enough reason to assume that today there is a trend towards what could be determined as professionalism, which draws from principles such as integrity, trust, honesty and so on, and it is an extension of one's character. Professionalism is a quality and an attitude towards work that self-respecting people are known to possess. This quality and attitude indicates a moral principle that governs professionalism. Work knowledge is a professional requirement; so also is good interpersonal skill, manners, time-management; qualities drawn out from respect for oneself and others. Similarly, combination of qualities such as conducting oneself with responsibility, integrity, accountability and excellence constitute professionalism.

Professionalism can be developed when a sense of ownership and belonging towards one's workplace is created. This sense of belonging can be created when understanding, concern and care is shared through words and actions. This means that professionalism is not just a standard in and for itself; it is the base and guard of good working environment and it holds true for all ages.



Having understood the importance of learning from the various arts, writers across the globe have now started to vouch for the relevance of learning nurturing behaviour from Humanities and Social Sciences. In this connection, Anderson, Douglas (2002) observed that without Humanities, „people risk losing not only its civility but also its humanity“ (Anderson, 2002, 127). Similar views have been given by E. Odegaard Charles (1949) that Humanities can aid in humanising people as individuals; while Bush, Douglas (1959) held that students need lessons on civility, on proper behaviour and conduct and that the Humanities

Civilise, humanise, and liberate the aggressive and sensual animal, to lead him to realise his distinctively human endowments, to refine and multiply his moments of vision, to free his better self from bondage to his ordinary self (Bush, Douglas, 1959, 41).

Visible support for learning through Humanities is also seen in the work of Lala, R.M. (1986), who held that it is time schools and universities undertook a study of leadership through the medium of history and biography. Newman,

- A. Stephen, & Newman, A. Stephen (2007) allowed that the speeches of Marcus Brutus and Mark Anthony in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, can be taken as great examples to teach law students persuasive advocacy. Similarly, Alexander (2015) advocated the importance of Humanities and Social Sciences, particularly for Management Education so as to help in better understanding of humans and life in its totality.

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