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Importance of soft skills in Teacher Education Programme

Education

KEYWORDS :

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To live to the challenge of globalization which is in line with the era of information economy, the strength of a nation is strongly dependent on the ability of its citizen to be highly intellectual and skillful. The development of human capital is thus important and necessary since it drives the nation to the envision vision and mission. Without a quality human capital, a nation will be weak as there is no human factor that is capable to embark on new initiatives and perspectives. A quality human capital comes from a quality education process. A carefully designed and well planned education system is critical to developing such human capital. Thus, institutions of teacher education plays a very important role to produce a human capital that is highly knowledgeable and skillful to meet the demand and expectations of many people. The teaching and learning processes in institutions of teacher education should be capable to provide such knowledge and skills to perspective teachers. The curriculum process of the teacher education should be capable of providing some knowledge and skills for teachers in conceptual and soft skills apart from hard skill. Infusing the soft skills in the curriculum of teacher education is the need of the profession for it to be successful.

Soft skills are personal attributes that enhance an individual's interactions, job performance and career prospects and hard skills which tend to be specific to a certain type of task or activity. We could say that soft skills refer to personality traits, social gracefulness, fluency in language, personal habits, friendliness and optimism that mark to varying degrees. Soft skills complement hard skills which are the technical requirements of a profession.It can also be an important part of the organization especially if the organization is dealing with people face to face.

The reorientation of education which is one trust of education for sustainability also relates the importance of these so-called soft skills.

Vast research and expert opinions have been sought in the effort to determine the specific soft skills to be implemented and used in teacher education programme. Based on the research findings obtained, seven soft kills have been identified and chosen to be implemented in all institutions of teacher education. They are :

(i) Communicative skills.
(ii) Thinking skills and Problem solving skills.
(iii) Team work force
(iv) Life-long learning and Information Management
(v) Entrepreneur skill
(vi) Ethics, moral and professionalism
(vii)Leadership skills

Each of the above soft skills comprised of several sub-skills. These sub-skills are divided into two categories of implementation. The first category delineates the soft skills that every individual **must have** and the second category represents soft skills that are **good to have.** Despite the emphasis being put on the soft skills that must be present **(must have),** it is also encouraged to inculcate the soft skills that are **good to have.** All elements of soft skills must be acquired by each individual student and evaluated effectively and comprehensively. Table 1 shows the seven soft skills and the two categories of sub-skills respectively.

The **(must have)** soft skills must be acquired by each and every individual in the institutions of teacher education without which, the student is regarded as incompetent in the above skill. The **(good to have)** soft skills can be regarded as the additional generic skills and a bonus to the student if these skills are acquired by the students together with the must have soft skills. Table 1 gives a detail description of the different categories of implementation for each of the sub-skills for the respective seven soft skills.

Table 1 Must Have and Good To Have Elements of Soft Skills

No.	Soft Skills	Must Have Elements (Sub-Skills)	Good To Have Elements (Sub-Skills)
1.	Communicative Skills	Ability to deliver idea clearly, effectively and with confidence either orally or in writing Ability to practice active listening skill 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.
2.	Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skills	Ability to identify and analyze problems in difficult situation and make justifiable evaluation. Ability to expand and improve thinking skills such as explanation, analysis and evaluate discussion. Ability to find ideas and look for alternative solutions.	Ability to think beyond. Ability to make conclusion based on valid proof. Ability to withstand and give full responsibility. Ability to understand and accommodate oneself to the varied working environment.
3.	Team Work	Ability to build a good rapport, interact and work effectively with others. Ability to understand and play the role of a leader and follower alternatively. Ability to recognize and respect other's attitude, behavior and beliefs.	Ability to give contribution to the planning and coordinate group work. Responsible towards group decision.
4.	Life-Long Learning & Information Management Skill	Ability to find and manage relevant information from various sources. Ability to receive new ideas performs autonomy learning.	Ability to develop and inquiry mind and seek knowledge.

5.	Entrepreneurship skills	Ability to identify job opportunities.	Ability to propose business opportunity. Ability to build, explore and seek business opportunities and job. Ability to be self-employed.
6.	Ethics, Moral & Professional	Ability to understand the economy crisis, environment and social cultural aspects professionally. Ability to analyze make problem solving decisions related to ethics.	Ability to practice ethical attitudes besides having the responsibility towards society.
7.	Leadership Skill	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.

It can be observed that education is an essential tool for achieving Sustainability. We all realized that the current economic development trends are not sustainable and that public awareness, education and training are the key elements to move our society towards sustainability. Only a quality future human capital can envision development of its nation to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Therefore, the inculcation of soft skills among the students will be two prongs, to produce quality human capital and to develop their knowledge, understanding, values and skills as well

Institutions have a major role to play in ensuring that pupils are socialized into a culture of self-reliance, resourcefulness, peace-oriented values health. Teachers are one of the main pillars of a sound and progressive. society.

They bear the weight and responsibility of teaching and apart from parents are the main sources of knowledge and values. The question of knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and skills that teachers should possess the subject of much debate in many countries. Therefore there is a need implement soft skills in teacher education programme through various models.

Models for implementing soft skills in higher education

A holistic approach is used to plan and implement the soft skills among students of teacher education programme. This approach is based on the combination of several programs and main activities; formal teaching and learning activities (include all curricular and co-curricular elements); support programs (academic and non-academic). Figure (1) shows the framework for implementing soft skills among students of higher institutions. In general, the development of soft skills among the students via the formal teaching and learning activities takes two models: (i) stand alone and (ii) embedded.

(i) Stand Alone Subject Model

This model uses the approach of training and providing opportunities to students to develop soft skills through specific courses that are carefully planned for this purpose. Usually, these subjects are offered as university courses (such as English language, entrepreneurship, etc) and elective courses (such as public speaking, critical thinking, etc). The courses in this category are often a part of the overall requirements that make up the program. The number of courses and credits in this category depends on the curriculum design and the requirements of the program. The stand alone subject model can also be initiated by encouraging students to sign-up several additional courses which can be accumulated to be a minor course which is different from the initial program signed-up. For example, a student who is pursuing a teacher education program is encouraged to take minor courses in management or mass communication. However, such an approach will require an increase in the number of credits and time spent for the particular program.

(ii) Embedded Model

This model uses the approach of embedding the soft skills in the teaching and learning activities across the curriculum. It does not require the student to take special courses as in the stand alone subject model. Instead the students are trained to master the soft skills through various formal teaching and learning activities that are planned and carried out using specific strategies and methods. In this way, the content and learning outcomes to be achieved for the respective courses are maintained. The learning outcomes related to the soft skills will be integrated and be part of the learning outcomes of the respective courses. This is the suggested model to be implemented in all the courses for the different programs in institutions of teacher education. Each element of soft skills is spelled out in the learning outcomes and then translated into the instructional plan for the semester. This is followed by implementing several teaching and learning activities such as questioning, class discussion, brain storming, team work, presentation, role play and simulation, task/project, field work and site visits.

In general, the development of soft skills using the embedded model requires the expertise of the lecturers to use the various teaching strategies and methods that are entirely student-centered. It also involves active teaching and learning and students should participate actively in the activities. Some of the appropriate strategies and methods that are practical include (i) learning by questioning, (ii) cooperative learning, (iii) problem-based learning (PBL), (iv) e-learning.

(iii) Combination of Stand Alone Subject Model and Embedded Model

Each of the respective models described above has its weaknesses and strengths. From the framework, planning, implementing and assessment, the stand alone model is definitely at an advantage. This is because the course or subject is specially developed to assist students to acquire the soft skills. However, this model lacked the opportunity for students to develop and acquire soft skills as integrated with other knowledge and skills in the major discipline studied. The existing number of credits for the respective program is also a constraint for students to sign-up for additional courses on soft skills.

On the contrary, the framework, planning, implementing and assessment of the embedded model are more challenging than the stand alone model. This model requires the lecturers to master specific teaching and learning skills and then apply these skills in teaching the respective core courses for the specific program. However, when carefully planned and used the appropriate teaching and learning strategies, this model is more effective in developing and acquiring the soft skills as integration with the other knowledge and skills in the program. In addition, this model does not require any additional courses to the already existing courses of the respective program. Based on the weaknesses and strengths discussed, the teacher education institutes are encouraged to use the embedded model i tri compared to the stand alone model. This is because the embedded model focus on student centered learning such experiential learning, problem-based learning and gives students the practical experience as well.

Development of soft skills through support programs

This involves programs and activities that are created, developed and used to support soft skills either directly or indirectly. In general, the program and activity can be divided into two: (i) academic support program and (ii) non-academic support program.

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The **academic support program** is to help students acquire the soft skills that are associated with academic matters.

As for the **non-academic support program,** it assists students to acquire the soft skills that are not related to academic matters but more of personality and professional development of the students. Most of the programs and activities are in the form of co-curriculum and extra co curriculum.

The fundamental courses are most important for teacher trainees to inculcate the soft skills, however the ideas expressed by educational thinkers in fundamental courses, such as Gandhi, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Rousseau, John Dewey and others including various psychologists and sociologists are often studied in a piecemeal manner. The hard skills are most visible and tangible and relatively easy to teach capable of being measured and therefore evaluated. Soft skills are interpersonal and human relations skills in other words "people skills" which include social, psychological and communicational skills.

The research studies have also identified some of the weaknesses among the teachers produced by the teacher education institutions. They are not so sound and lack the so-called soft skills demanded by the society. Hence, the institutions of the teacher education are urged to produce quality teachers who are equally intelligent possess excellent attitude, high ethical and moral values. Hence, reorientation of teacher education curriculum should concentrate on infusing soft skills related aspects to meet the needs of society. So, teacher education programmes have to make a conscious effort in designing courses that generate deeper understanding of three skills viz., hard skills, soft skills and conceptual skills.

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