

## Soft Skills : An Asset For Students

SHOBHA RAO

(Received: September 05, 2014; Accepted: November 20, 2014)

### ABSTRACT

This paper focuses the importance of soft skills for students at the tertiary level as it is from here that most students move to the world of work. It is the special responsibility of lecturers to train students in soft skills as they are skills for life. Soft skills could be efficiently imbibed by integrating them into their core subjects. There is lot of scope to integrate soft skills in ELT (English Language Teaching). By doing so it achieves the twin purpose of teaching the language and refining their personality. Just as we notice only the tip of the ice-berg and not the huge ice chunk beneath, hard skills is the tip of the ice-berg which can be known through testing, but soft skills and its various components are the hidden portions which can be seen through one's answers in the interview sessions and during work. Further, this paper also tries to link soft skills with emotional intelligence and multiple intelligences, thereby integrating all the three together. In addition, it also suggests some activities that can be done in class to foster soft skills. It becomes therefore imperative to state that soft skills is the need of the hour and that students need to be trained in soft skills so that they not only become resourceful employees and family members, but also good citizens of the world.

**Key words:** Student, Soft skills, ELT (English Language Teaching).

### INTRODUCTION

To begin with, let's see what many scholars have to say about soft skills. According to (Schulz, 2007), soft skills complement hard skills and play an important role in shaping an individual. Further, hard and soft skills together constitute professional competence of an individual which allows a goal-oriented and situational accomplishment of working tasks (Kauffeld, Grote, & Frieling, 2003). Further, Murty (2008) states, "Our business in life is not to get ahead of other people, but to get ahead of ourselves. To break our own records, to out rip yesterdays by todays, to bear our trails more beautifully that we ever dreamt we could, to whip the temper inside out as we never have, to do our work with more flair and a finer finish than ever-this is the true idea-to go ahead of ourselves." Furthermore, Dhanavel (2010) affirms 'to know what others feel is a soft skill and that there is an urgent concern to equip graduating

students with skills that are essential for the work place. However, soft skills training should happen continuously throughout the formal education system so that students develop the required competencies ,social and behaviour skills that are essential at the job front Shipurkar (2009).

So there is great concern to make students feel that they need to work on their soft skills during their days in college so as to be successful both at the job and personal fronts. It is further more important as many companies who recruit students at the campus interview feel that they lack soft skills needed for the job. So in order to get an edge over the others students have to add value to their knowledge by refining their soft skills. It is therefore the responsibility of the academicians to see that there is a paradigm shift in the teaching of soft skills so as to make students more equipped when they go to the job front.

Furthermore, this paper also makes a link between soft skills, emotional intelligence and multiple intelligences. Rao (2010) rightly states that soft skills are all about skills, abilities and traits pertaining to personality, attitude and behaviour that are non- technical skills. These are collection of several skills such as team building, leadership, motivation, time management, presentation skills, etc. These skills are also known as people skills, emotional intelligence, social skills and interpersonal skills that help in gaining employment. The author here has called soft skills as emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills (an aspect of personal intelligence as stated by Howard Gardener). In other words we would say that Multiple Intelligence(MI) + Emotional Intelligence(EI) + Social Intelligence (SI) are what constitutes soft skills (SS) which are essential criteria necessary for success in one's personal life as well at work besides technical know- how. What matters more is helping students learn how to use their intelligences so that they can carry out the activities that will enable them to be productive members of society.

#### **Activities to Imbibe Soft Skills in the ELS(English as Second Language) classroom**

As students need to imbibe soft skills during the course of their study, a variety of activities need to be used right from the beginning of the academic year. Some of them are suggested below.

#### **National and International Seminars on soft skills**

This can bring great experts in soft skills to the portals of the colleges. Their valuable talks, interactions and workshops could be an inspiration to many students who do not have much knowledge about soft skills.

#### **Interaction with the Human Resource Department**

Students can be taken to standard companies so that they get a feel of an office atmosphere. In groups they could have a discussion with Head of the HR department on what employers look for in employees. This hands- on experience could help students mould themselves to the needs of the company.

#### **Group Discussions**

GD must be a constant activity in the classes where in students discuss a case study and cull out the soft skills that formed the core of that case study. With constant discussions of this sort students can be made to understand the role of leaders, briefers and workers in a team.

#### **Project Work**

Projects must go hand in hand with classroom teaching of soft skills. Project work would get a better insight of their soft skills , as students go further to prepare projects to the best of their ability.

#### **Soft Skills in Daily Life**

Soft skills must be made a part and parcel of one's daily living. Lecturers need to be role models and they need to insist that students practice soft skills at home and in college. For instance: Time management must be followed from the time one wakes up till he/she retires to bed. Similarly, students must be made to identify the causes of stress, how to handle it and learn from those experiences.

#### **SWOT**

Students must be made to write the strength, weakness, opportunities and threats they face every day and how they are able to turn the threats and weakness in their favour. This exercise of daily focusing on their SWOT would help them become better individuals. In the literature class, characters from literature can be analyzed using the SWOT tool so that students appreciate the characters strength, weakness, opportunity and strength thereby understanding the cause of the characters success and failure. A good example is Macbeth in Shakespeare's play.

#### **Stress on Communication**

It has been observed that students at the tertiary level do not speak in English..Few colleges have language labs without the necessary infrastructure. Therefore, presentations should be a part and parcel of the teaching-learning process in the classroom.

**Reading the Newspaper**

Lot of soft skills can be imbibed by reading the daily newspapers. Students must be made to cull out soft skills from a particular news item. They must be made to think creatively and critically on issues rather than reading the paper for the sake of reading.

**Dress Code and Etiquette**

Viewing the way students dress to college, all colleges must adhere to strict dress code that match the job market. These will give them a sense of dressing and etiquette which is very much required in the corporate world.

**Integrating Multiple-Intelligence and Soft Skills in the Teaching Module**

Soft skills and multiple Intelligence (Gardener, 1983) modules can be taught through the lessons. In this way, students can imbibe soft skills very easily and can understand which intelligence/s there are strong and which of them they are weak. This enables them to focus on their weakness and improve upon their strengths.

**CONCLUSION****Need for a Paradigm Shift**

Looking at the current scenario at the corporate front, there is an urgent need to teach soft skills more efficiently and effectively. Though colleges in Chennai offer soft skills as one of the subjects that make students write the exam for the sake of credits, it is not helping them get a good job and keep it as well. Today students have to show they have an edge over the other for which they need to show they are better than the others in their hard skills and be at their best in their soft skills as well. For this, equal importance should be given for effective and efficient training of both hard and soft skills .

To conclude, this paper is also a clarion call for students to master their soft skills before they leave the portals of their college. To support this Ganzel (2001) has rightly stated that the paradigm shift in the twenty-first century workforce has forced employees to be well armed with soft skills.

**REFERENCES**

1. Dhanavel, S. P. English and Soft Skills. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd (2010).
2. Ganzel, R. Hard training for soft skills. *Training*, **38**(6), 56-60. Retrieved from (2001)
3. February 2, 2007, from EBSCOhost <http://web7.epnet.com.spot.lib.auburn.edu>
4. Kauffeld, S., Grote, S., & Frieling, E. Das Kasseler-Kompetenz-Raster (KKR). [The Kasseler-Competence-Pattern]. In J. Erpenbeck & L. v. Rosenstiel (Eds.), *Handbuch Knowledge Economy, Proceedings of UNEVOC*, Retrieved from <http://www.umanitoba.ca/unevoc/2002conference/text/papers/munby.pdf> (2003).
5. Rao, M.S. Soft Skills Enhancing Employability Connecting Campus with Corporate. New Delhi.: IK International Publishing House Pvt. Ltd (2010).
6. Schulz, B. The Importance of Soft Skills: Education beyond academic knowledge *NAWA Journal of Language and Communication*, 146 -155 (2008).
7. Shipurkar, R. Equipping Indian Graduates with Soft Skills: A Trainer's Perspective in 'Soft skills Cornerstone of Professional Success.' New Delhi: Jain Brothers (2009).
8. Murty, GRK. Soft Skills for Success. Tripura: IUP, (2008)