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## Soft skills and their application in teaching

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### Abstract

Soft skills are an essential component of effective teaching, influencing student engagement, learning outcomes, and classroom management. This research paper explores the role of soft skills in education, highlighting their impact on teacher-student relationships, communication, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and leadership. The paper also examines strategies for developing soft skills among educators and their integration into professional training programs. By analyzing the prevailing competitive scenario at every professional front, the paper emphasizes the necessity of soft skills in modern teaching practices.

**Keywords:** Soft skills, teaching, communication, emotional intelligence, adaptability, leadership, classroom management

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### Introduction

Education is a dynamic field that requires more than just subject-matter expertise. Teachers must possess soft skills to foster a productive learning environment, communicate effectively with students, and address diverse challenges. Unlike technical skills, which pertain to specific knowledge areas, soft skills encompass personal attributes such as communication, teamwork, empathy, and emotional intelligence.

This paper aims to examine the role of soft skills in teaching, their impact on the success of students and strategies required for enhancing them among educators. The paper will also discuss how soft skills contribute to a positive learning environment and help teachers handle various classroom situations.

### Understanding Soft Skills in Teaching

Soft skills refer to interpersonal and intrapersonal skills that influence how individuals interact, work and build relationships. In teaching, soft skills play a crucial role in engaging students, managing classrooms, and fostering a positive learning atmosphere. "Soft skills are non-technical skills that affect an individual's ability to work effectively with others (Robles, 2012) <sup>[10]</sup>." These skills include communication, teamwork, adaptability, emotional intelligence, leadership, and problem-solving abilities.

### Relevance of Soft Skills in Teaching

Teaching is not just about delivering content but also about inspiring, motivating, and guiding students. Soft skills help teachers in building strong relationships with students which is essential for fostering a positive learning environment in the classroom and enhancing student's engagement in class activities. Teachers with well-developed soft

skills such as communication, emotional intelligence, empathy, and adaptability can establish trust, improve student's motivation, and create a more supportive classroom environment. This section of the paper will focus on how soft skills contribute to stronger teacher-student relationships and their impact on student's learning and development.

### Key Soft Skills for Building Teacher-Student Relationships are

Several soft skills are essential for effective teaching. These skills contribute to classroom success and student development. Teachers who have efficient communication skills, show empathy and emotional availability for the students cultivate a conducive teaching-learning environment. Major set of soft skills include:

#### Communication Skills

According to Owen Hargie, Professor of Communication at Ulster University, has stated in his famous book titled "*Social Skills in Interpersonal Communication*":

"Effective communication is fundamental in teaching. Teachers must convey complex ideas in simple terms, actively listen to students, and provide constructive feedback. Clear verbal and non-verbal communication improves student understanding and engagement (2016)."

Effective communication is the foundation of any strong relationship. Teachers who communicate clearly and respectfully create an environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves. It is the primary responsibility of a good teacher to encourage open dialogue in the classes, making students feel heard and valued. A teacher with effective communication skills can conveniently

explain concepts clearly, leaving negligible chances of confusion and frustration among students. If there is anything that requires more details especially in weaker students or those with special needs then the healthy environment of the classroom will facilitate the weakest student of the group to ask his questions without any hesitation. This enables constructive feedback, allowing students to improve without fear of criticism. Such conducive teacher-student relationships support conflict resolution, ensuring misunderstandings do not damage harmonious relationships. For example, a teacher who actively listens to students and acknowledges their concerns fosters mutual respect. If a student struggles with a concept, a teacher's clear explanation and patience can strengthen their trust and willingness to seek help.

Efficient communication of a teacher includes application of clear language to explain concepts, encouraging open discussions, providing feedback in an empathetic and constructive manner and using body language to reinforce messages.

### **Emotional Intelligence (EI)**

Emotional intelligence involves recognizing and managing one's emotions while understanding and responding to others' emotions. Teachers with high Emotional intelligence can connect with students on an emotional level, making them feel supported. EI plays a pivotal role in enhancing empathy, allowing teachers to understand students' struggles. An emotionally intelligent teacher remains calm and composed, even in challenging situations. This surely encourages positive reinforcement, boosting confidence and motivation among students. Not only this, an emotionally intelligent teacher carefully assists in handling behavioral issues with sensitivity rather than punishment. This can be justified by a suitable example where a teacher notices that a usually engaged student is suddenly withdrawn. Instead of assuming disinterest, the teacher privately checks in, showing empathy and concern. This small act of emotional intelligence strengthens trust and encourages the student to share his challenges. In the words of D. Goldman, "Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's emotions and those of others (1995)." Teachers with high EI can build stronger relationships with students, resolve conflicts effectively, and create a positive classroom environment. In teaching, a teacher capable of recognising student's emotions and responding appropriately, managing stress and staying calm under pressure, encouraging empathy among students, creating a supportive and inclusive learning atmosphere can be considered with high emotional intelligence nurturing the future of the students with compassion.

### **Empathy and Compassion**

The qualities of empathy and compassion allow teachers to understand students' feelings and perspectives, fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Empathy encourages students

to feel safe and valued in the classroom. It builds trust, making students more open to seeking help and guidance. Moreover, these virtues help in reducing behavioral issues, as students feel understood rather than judged and boost a culture of kindness and mutual respect. Let us understand it through a situation where a student is struggling with a personal issue and his class performance declines, an empathetic and compassionate teacher will offer support rather than punishment. The teacher may provide extra help or suggest counseling, showing the student he is cared for beyond academics.

### **Adaptability and Flexibility**

Every student is unique, with different learning styles, abilities, and challenges. Teachers who are adaptable can adjust their teaching strategies to meet diverse needs of the students. Darling-Hammond has stated:

"Classrooms are diverse, and students have different learning needs. Adaptability allows teachers to modify teaching strategies based on student responses, technological advancements, and curriculum changes (2017)."

The quality of adaptability in a teacher ensures that teaching methods accommodate various learning styles, hence allowing them to modify classroom rules to fit the needs of individual students. This quality helps teachers respond positively to unexpected challenges or disruptions. It also encourages students to embrace change and be open to learning. For example if a teacher notices that a student with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) struggles with traditional lecture-based learning. By incorporating hands-on activities and movement-based exercises, the teacher can ensure that the student remains engaged and successful, strengthening their relationship.

Adaptability and flexibility can be applied in teaching by adjusting lesson plans to cater to different learning styles of the learners, integrating new teaching technologies, adapting to unexpected classroom situations and also by modifying assessment methods based on student needs

### **Patience and Active Listening**

Patience is key when working with students who have different learning speeds and emotional needs. Active listening ensures that students feel heard and valued. These traits stimulate a sense of trust by showing students that their concerns and questions matter. They further encourage students to express themselves without any fear of judgment, hence reducing frustration for students who struggle with learning concepts. An educator who shows patience while listening to the problems of his students significantly succeeds in resolving classroom conflicts calmly and effectively. Let us take an example of a student who has difficulty in understanding a problem of Mathematics may feel discouraged. A patient teacher who listens to their concerns and provides alternative explanations reassures the student and strengthens their confidence.

### **Leadership and Classroom Management**

“Leadership skills help teachers guide students, set expectations, and maintain discipline. Effective classroom management ensures a structured and conducive learning environment (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003) <sup>[8]</sup>.” Along with empathy, compassion and emotional support for the students, a teacher needs to show his leadership skills to maintain discipline in the classroom. A teacher with leadership skills tries to establish classroom rules and routines which every student is expected to obey. He manages undisciplined behavior of students positively, engaging them in teamwork.

### **Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking**

“Teachers often encounter challenges that require quick decision-making and problem-solving skills. Critical thinking helps educators analyze situations and implement effective solutions (Paul & Elder, 2013) <sup>[9]</sup>.” Addressing student conflicts and behavioral issues, finding innovative ways to teach difficult concepts, encouraging students to develop their own problem-solving skills and evaluating the effectiveness of teaching strategies are some of the areas where the analytical approach of the teachers is appraised.

### **Impact of Strong Teacher-Student Relationships on Learning**

When teachers develop strong relationships with students through soft skills, the benefits extend beyond emotional support. Research suggests that “teachers with strong soft skills create a more engaging and supportive learning environment, leading to better student performance (Boyatzis, 2008) <sup>[1]</sup>.” It fosters critical thinking and spirit of mutual understanding and collaboration while performing tasks. A valued and respected student is more likely to participate actively in group activities, increasing higher student engagement in collaborative work. A supportive teacher-student relationship increases motivation and effort in learning, thus improving academic performance. It is also an established fact that students who trust their teachers are less likely to act out, as they feel understood and supported, exhibiting better classroom behaviour. A teacher with a good set of soft skills understands the importance of positive reinforcement among students hence he keeps encouraging his students. The encouragement from a teacher helps students develop self-esteem and resilience. Studies show that students who have positive relationships with their teachers demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement, social development, and emotional well-being (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) <sup>[7]</sup>.

Soft skills are essential for building strong teacher-student relationships. Effective communication, emotional intelligence, empathy, adaptability, and patience help teachers connect with students on a deeper level, creating a positive and engaging learning environment. By fostering trust and understanding, teachers can significantly impact students’ academic success and personal

development. Investing in soft skills training for educators ensures that classrooms are not just spaces for learning but also environments of support, encouragement, and growth.

### **Strategies for Developing Soft Skills in Teachers**

Developing soft skills requires conscious effort and training. Educators can enhance these skills through various methods.

#### **Faculty Development Programs (FDP)**

Faculty Development Programs should not be restricted only for the growth of their academic competencies. These programs should include soft skills training for teachers to improve their ability in classroom management and student engagement in team activities- enhance teacher's efficiency to connect with students, colleagues and parents. “Workshops and training sessions help teachers improve communication, emotional intelligence, and classroom management skills (Hattie, 2009) <sup>[6]</sup>.”

#### **Mentorship and Peer Learning**

Collaborating with experienced educators allows teachers to learn best practices and receive feedback on their teaching methods.

#### **Self-Reflection and Continuous Learning**

Teachers should regularly assess their strengths and areas for improvement through self-reflection, student feedback, and professional learning communities.

#### **Incorporating Soft Skills Training in Teacher Education**

In this context, Freeman has rightly suggested in *The Role of Teacher Education in Developing Soft Skills*, “Teacher training programs should include soft skills development alongside technical knowledge to prepare educators for real-world challenges (Freeman *et al.*, 2014) <sup>[3]</sup>.”

#### **Impact of Soft Skills on Student Learning and Classroom Environment**

Teachers with strong soft skills contribute to a positive learning experience, leading to:

- Improved student engagement and participation
- Higher academic performance
- Stronger teacher-student relationships
- Better classroom discipline and conflict resolution

“Studies indicate that students in classrooms led by teachers with high emotional intelligence and effective communication skills exhibit greater motivation and learning outcomes (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) <sup>[7]</sup>.”

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### **Challenges in Developing and Applying Soft Skills in Teaching**

Despite their importance, developing soft skills in educators faces several challenges including:

- Lack of emphasis on soft skills in teacher training programs
- Resistance to change among educators
- Time constraints in professional development
- Difficulty in assessing soft skills improvement
- To overcome these challenges, schools and educational institutions should integrate soft skills training into continuous professional development programs.

### **Conclusion**

Soft skills are indispensable in teaching, influencing communication, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and classroom management. Educators who develop these skills create engaging and supportive learning environments that enhance student success. Training programs, mentorship, and self-reflection play a vital role in fostering soft skills among teachers.

Future research should explore how technology can support the development of soft skills in education. Schools must recognize the value of soft skills and incorporate them into teacher training to prepare educators for modern classroom challenges.

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