

Identify best practices and challenges associated with integrating soft skills training into language courses in the context of tertiary education

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Abstract - This case study included 250 randomly chosen undergraduates and first-year management students from SOA University. Training in soft skills, including grammar, vocabulary, and speaking ability, was provided to three randomly selected groups of thirty students each on Saturday as an additional credit hour in the course curriculum. The control group consisted of 160 students from the same class. After a year of the final exam that is, with an incubation time of one year after the training session—it was discovered that 28 students (93.33 percent), 18 students (60 percent), and 22 students (73.33 percent) from the Grammar group won a spot in the campus selection, respectively. In the experimental group, 105 students (42.0%) were placed, but in the control group, only 37 students (23.13%) were placed. This trend is quite concerning and requires immediate action. Educators have been harping on the idea that ESL and soft skill training are complementary for quite some time. Despite sharing a same ancestor, they are distinct individuals with strikingly identical appearance, personality, and palate. Improving one's command of the English language and other "soft skills" is a top priority for success in the modern world.

Keywords: Communication, Employability, Language, Placement, Soft skill, Training

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INTRODUCTION

Important are teachers' interpersonal abilities. Improving both teaching and learning outcomes is possible with these abilities. One of the most important things that schools can do to help students learn is to have good teachers (Tang, 2013). It takes a diverse set of abilities, both technical and interpersonal, to be an effective teacher (Tang, Nor Hashimah & Hashimah, upcoming 2015). New educators need strong soft skills due to the fact that teaching is a difficult process in and of itself (Flores & Days, 2006).

Even while talents are fundamental for a job, both the idea and practice of "soft skills" leave much to be desired. There have been actual studies that have shown how crucial it is to have general skills like good communication, problem solving, and teamwork ability in order to execute efficiently.

Improving the system of teaching and learning is one

way to help raise the bar for educational excellence. Therefore, universities should be able to disseminate knowledge and produce skilled workers who are well-rounded in every way. Indian universities are making strides to ensure the continued growth of a well-rounded and integrated human resource. Among India's stated goals is the improvement of its human resource infrastructure. This worries me since it has to do with the quality of Indian university grads. One of the graduates' many flaws is their severe lack of the "soft skills" that employers and society value so highly. As a result, schools of higher learning should strive to turn out students with a high standard of character, strong moral principles, and exceptional intelligence. Under the rubric of "Implementation of Various strategies for Soft Skills Integrated education in Sustainable Higher Education," the researcher set out to investigate this very issue.

As a result of economic liberalisation and globalisation, competition in the Indian market has heated up, and young people today, in order to compete on a global scale, need to discover their full potential by honing their soft skills and showcasing their talent at national and international stages. Many schools have begun to prioritise initiatives to help their pupils acquire the "soft skills" necessary for success in the business world, after seeing the seriousness of the problem with communication. Language learning, high-quality education, and a strengthened training system for students' career development and promotion have been introduced by several service industries as a result of technological breakthroughs that are paving the way for a knowledge economy. Skills in problem-solving, decision-making, analysis, leadership, communication, and personality development are some of the many areas that have benefited from the rise of the knowledge economy. These include engineering, management, IT, healthcare, and the hospitality industry. Managing change via continuous learning is essential for students to sustainably advance their careers in light of the rapidly changing cultures of today's workplaces. Soft skills pertain to learning a language, an individual's conduct, and proper grooming etiquette in order to increase one's employability, while hard skills focus on concepts, academic abilities, experience, topic knowledge, and other quality indicators such as methods and principles in order to improve performance.

Consequently, educators must heed the educational equivalent of a siren's cry. Recent grads clearly struggle with workplace negotiation. To ensure a seamless transition with minimal obstacles, it is crucial to teach learners wisely, provide them with a wealth of collective knowledge and rich experience, and raise their awareness of fundamental soft skills. This will give them an advantage and make them more readily absorbable by the workforce. Because of this, there has to be a dramatic change in how we teach. The demands of employers should inform the development of course content and course syllabi. Aspiring Minds' chief technology officer Varun Aggarwal said, "Engineering has become the de facto graduate degree for a large chunk of students today" in the same Business Line article. But we must also transform our undergraduate courses to make them more focused on getting students jobs, in addition to raising the bar for education generally. As a result, demonstrating a range of soft skills is crucial for recent college grads right now. Teachers at universities and colleges must meet this critical need immediately.

Some of the basic Soft Skills required to be employable are shown in the diagram below.



All of us have the potential to flourish when we use our soft talents. Her essay titled "Need and Importance of Soft skills in Students" discusses soft skills. "Soft skills are learned behaviours which require training and focused application," explains Rani (2010). Students will be able to construct, develop, and lead teams with the help of their soft skills, which provide a solid theoretical and practical foundation. Their impact on students' personal growth and future professional opportunities is significant. The market does not place a premium on academic credentials and accomplishments alone, therefore it is crucial for universities to produce graduates with the skills employers need. According to West (1998), graduates should be committed to learning and professional growth for the rest of their lives. This further suggests that year after year, graduates don't seem to have what the market needs to help them practise their profession. In order to stay ahead of the competition, employers are looking for a varied group of abilities and qualities in freshly recruited graduates. According to Birrell (2006), a scarcity of skilled workers is affecting several nations. Because they put all their faith in educational institutions, pupils have no right to complain about this deficiency. Universities and colleges in the modern era should not function as placement offices or training programmes, but rather as venues for intellectual growth and development; they should encourage students to think critically, generate original ideas, and add to the existing body of knowledge. This, however, in no way negates the need of preparing students for the rigours of the working world. It becomes more difficult for the English instructor to help her pupils understand the

finer points needed to be prepared for the real world when they prioritise their main topics. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the English instructor to subtly but effectively equip their pupils with an adequate set of soft skills and to help them understand their significance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tang, (2018) Effective and quality teaching and managing student skills are two components of lecturers' learning of soft skills. But how can distant learners have their abilities adequately managed by their instructors? According to the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia (2006), "soft skills" may be included into several generic talents that make up the cognitive components of non-academic skills. While it's true that there are no hard and fast rules for what constitutes a "soft skill," the qualities that are most often associated with them are optimism, leadership, teamwork, communication, and a commitment to continuous learning. According to the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education (2006), in today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, the most valuable asset for job seekers is a set of soft skills. The significance of these so-called soft skills is also connected to the refocusing of education towards sustainability. Because of this, the skills envisioned in ESD will indirectly reach college graduates, who need them to satisfy the demands of the labour market. In order to identify which soft skills should be taught at Malaysian universities, a lot of study and expert perspectives were sought. All Malaysian universities have adopted the same set of seven "soft skills" derived from the study's results. They are as follows: (1) effective communication; (2) critical thinking and problem solving; (3) collaboration; (4) commitment to continuous learning and effective information management; (5) entrepreneurial spirit; (6) integrity, honesty, and professionalism; (7) leadership. In order for pupils to learn these abilities, teachers must possess them themselves.

Hager, Garrick and Crowley (2020), outlined several essential soft skill components for effective performance in their paper, "The Generic Competencies and Workplace Reform in the Australian Construction Industry." A few knowledge centres conducted the survey, which identified the most crucial abilities as collaboration and communication. According to the findings of this study, medium and senior level officials often need to employ problem-solving, planning, organizing, and communication abilities.

Winfred Arthur, Winston Bennett, Pamela S. Edeus, Suzanne T. Bell, and others (2020) investigated meta-analytic tests to measure the

mutual impact of training and assessment. Organisational analysis: who needs to be trained and for what purpose? This requires evaluation. They came to an end with these the perceived efficacy of training programmes is correlated with meta-analytic processes that create assessment criteria and the skill or task characteristic learned. The fact that other factors that can have an impact on performance effectiveness are not taken into account by the study continues to be inconsistent.

Faheem Ahmed, et al (2021) Kumar et al (2019): These studies investigate whether the soft skill needs for the IT programming industry vary by region and culture. They discover that although the requirements for programmers, testers, and designers remain mostly same, there is a small variation in the soft skill requirements for system analysts between places.

Beth Benjamin and Charles O'reilly (2013) note that leadership development is often mentioned as a top organisational objective. The study restates that, despite widespread criticism of the MBA programme as a whole, it is nonetheless a valuable tool for developing effective corporate leadership. Even while we all know a great deal about the responsibilities and functions of leaders, very little is known about the challenges faced by younger students who have just graduated. Using in-depth interviews as a method of data collection, they worked with a sample size of 55 to identify the early career challenges they faced. They discovered three types of transitions that young leaders described as "important" for their development, as well as four difficulties they encountered along the way, such as immaturity, non-acceptance, communication gaps, and (availability of) the right guidance. Reviewer comments: Some of the results may help determine how to better the MBA programme so that it is more in line with anticipated responsibilities and less challenging for students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Eighty-nine first-year management and undergraduate students from SOA University were selected at random to participate in this case study. Of them, thirty were assigned to each of three groups. Each of the three groups spent an additional credit hour on Saturday taking a course on soft skills, such as business communication. A focus on grammar and vocabulary was central to the first group's training, while fluency in speech, phonetics, and soft skills were the focal points of the third. The remaining 160 pupils from the same class served as controls. The research was place in Bengaluru. The

pupils ranged in age from seventeen to nineteen and were all from the same class. All three of their majors—Communicative English, Psychology, and English Literature—were being studied by first-year college students. Graduates from this class were not all first-generation. The majority of them hail from well-off families. Plus, the vast majority of them attended schools that used the English medium. They have no trouble communicating in English. Data was analysed and expressed as percentages after the questionnaire was given to the participants. The 52-week soft skill training programme was implemented. Success rate in campus selection was then used to evaluate the training's efficacy.

DATA ANALYSIS

Statement 1

The learners' familiarity with the term "Soft Skills" was tested in the first item of the survey. Because the responses of students who were asked at random to identify a Soft Skill were unexpected, this was a crucial question to ask. Lots of people admitted right away that they had no idea what "Soft Skills" were. Nonetheless, they would have had a general notion of the questions asked from the form.

On analysis it was evident that:

70% of the learners seemed to have some idea of what Soft Skills were. It must also be noted that many students had varied interpretations for the same question since the questionnaire was open ended.

20 % of the learners were unsure of what Soft Skills were.

10% of the learners clearly stated that they did not know what Soft Skills were.

Statement 2

The second statement was a probing question, which intended to find out if the learners knew if they possessed any Soft Skills.

On analysis it was evident that:

75% of the learners stated that they possessed Soft Skills.

15% of the learners stated that they did not know that they possessed any Soft Skills.

10% of the learners stated that they were unsure if they possessed any Soft Skills.

On analysis this shows that many learners, although belonging to a cosmopolitan city, were not very sure of the Soft Skills that they possessed. This is despite the fact that they had spent at least 4 months in the institution and had mixed fairly well on campus.

Statement 3

The third statement required the students to list the Soft Skills according to what they thought were important soft skills. This is how they listed the Soft Skills:

1. Listening Skills	23.94%
2. Speaking Skills	09.85%
3. Inter personal Skills	09.85%
4. Leadership Skills	09.85%
5. Presentation Skills	01.40%
6. Conflict management	00.00%
7. Time management	04.22%
8. Stress management	11.26%
9. Writing skills	00.00%
10. Persuasion Skills	00.00%
11. Negotiation Skills	00.00%
12. Public speaking	00.00%
13. Decision making	09.85%
14. Etiquette	19.71%

The results showed that out of all the soft skills, students ranked listening skills as the most essential (23.94 percent). Students think that improving one's listening abilities should therefore get greater attention. Additional instruction in active listening is necessary.

Etiquette was ranked second most essential by those people (19.71%). There was an implication that students are aware of the fact that they need instruction on how to present themselves to others. Impressions count, and they are aware of this.

Stress management was emphasized as the third crucial soft skill (11.26%).

Some students also placed a high value on the ability to effectively manage their time (4.22%) and provide effective presentations (1.40%).

The fact that the same number of students (00.00%) ranked Interpersonal Skills, Decision Making Skills, Speaking Skills, and Leadership Skills as their top priority is startling.

Statement 4

The fourth question was to seek information about how aware the learners are about the Soft Skills that

they possessed. It also proved to find out if they possessed the Soft Skills required to get a job.

37% of the learners stated that they possessed Soft Skills and that they were job ready.

39% of the learners stated that they did not have the required Soft Skills and were not ready for a job.

24% of the learners stated that they were unsure if they possessed the required Soft Skills and therefore unsure if they were ready to take on a job.

Statement 5

The fifth statement wanted to know what Soft Skills the learners would like training in. The top four Soft Skills that the learners would like to get training in are:

- 01. Time Management
- 02. Stress Management
- 03. Public Speaking
- 04. Decision Making

This finding was in stark contrast to statement 3. But nonetheless it becomes evident from the responses received that the four Soft Skills mentioned above needed special attention and inclusion in the syllabus.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tabulated in Table 1 are the findings relevant to this investigation. Results showed that 28 students (93.33 percent) from the Speaking Ability group, 18 students (60 percent) from the Grammar group, and 22 students (73.33 percent) from the Vocabulary group were selected for campus after one year of the final exam, which is equivalent to an incubation period of one year following the training period. It should be noted that out of the students enrolled in the trial programme, 105 (42.0%) were placed, whereas just 37 (23.13%) were placed without soft skill training. Figure 1 and Figure 2 are graphical representations of the data showing the relationship between enrollment and success, and success and failure, of students, respectively.

The results of the current case's placement study show that, compared to students from the same batch who received training one year later, those who received instruction on soft skills had a better chance of succeeding on campus placement. These results are in agreement with those of Murali and Rajaram (2015) and Hutchinson et al. (1987).

Table 1. Impact of soft skill training on different groups of students

Sl.No.	Group Name	No. of enrolled students	No. of successful students	% of success
1	Grammar	30	22	73.33
2	Vocabulary	30	18	60.00
3	Speaking ability	30	28	93.33
4	Control	160	37	23.13
	Overall	250	105	42.00

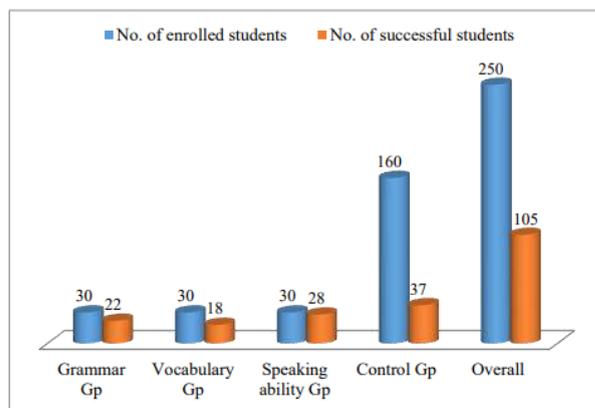


Figure 1. Number of enrolled vis-a-vis successful students over groups

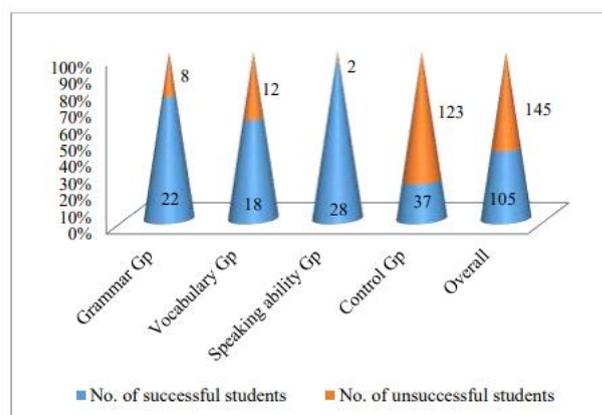


Figure 2. Comparison of successful vis-a-vis unsuccessful students over groups

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE OF STUDY

- It would be beneficial to get better results if the overall attendance of the students under study throughout the training session was raised from 72%.
- It may take two years to see results after an incubation period of one year, as was used in the current research.
- The second and third years of the programme might be restructured to include longer sessions of soft skill training.

- For a more varied classroom experience, it may be beneficial to have many instructors lead the course.
- Better practical exposure and a higher success rate may be achieved via the use of mock interviews.
- In order to assess the results with statistical significance, it would be beneficial to perform more research with a broad set of students and with larger numbers.

SUGGESTION AND RECOMMENDATION

- Continuing to refine the institution's skill set in light of regional, national, and international demands and expectations.
- Integrating cognitive knowledge with soft skills should be a priority when designing curricula, and there should be a proper connection between theory and practice to help students develop these abilities.
- Teachers and professors with experience should be able to assess their students' needs and tailor their lessons appropriately.
- Students' awareness of the significance of soft skills in their professional growth, as this leads to increased knowledge and improved work performance.
- To enhance students' soft skills, the curriculum should incorporate activities such as lectures, demonstrations, role plays, group discussions, presentations, interview etiquette with reasoning aptitude, regular field visits, conflict resolution techniques, practical examples, Just A Minute (JAM), and impromptu speeches.
- To raise students' awareness, industry experts should be invited to give corporate talks. In order for pupils to practice corporate manners and other grooming conventions, teachers should create an atmosphere in the classroom that mimics a genuine workplace.

CONCLUSION

So, the researcher has concluded from the data analysis that undergraduates believe they have a good grasp of the concept of "Soft Skills," but they also recognize that they have a lot of space to grow in this area. Even if you don't know what "Soft Skills" are, you may start developing them while you learn. For certain students, the ability to listen attentively is crucial and therefore a "Soft Skill" that must be honed in the classroom. Thus, the instructor is in a better position to step in and assist the pupils as they work to improve their abilities. With the right set of soft skills, undergraduates will be more prepared and self-

assured to take on the world of employment after they graduate. In our nation, having strong communication skills is crucial for landing a decent job. In order to secure a long-term employment with their company, employees must work diligently, give their all, and follow their bosses' instructions to the letter. A candidate's communication skills and personality attributes are just as important as their academic achievement when it comes to influencing employers. Companies are always on the lookout for talented people who can compete on a global scale, live up to their standards, and lead their companies to new heights.

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