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# The Need and Parameters of Soft Skills: A Study in Indian Perspective

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**Abstract:** *Soft skills training has become a very common practice in India and abroad in recent time, especially with the acceleration of globalization process. The present paper attempts to trace the necessity of soft skills training in Indian perspectives. It discusses that the growth of modern education system during the period of colonization was the foundation upon which all the modern education systems and their concomitant problems stand. A close study of Indian history is carried out as it forms the back ground of an indigenous and a well-established system of education. The gurukulas and ashramas were the focal centres of education in ancient India. Lord Macaulay's charter on Indian education changed the face, which we still carry forward. The case studies and knowledge papers have been analysed to trace the different parameters for soft skills. The practical modules and its methodology that are being practised are elucidated. The difference of soft and hard skills are elucidated and the skills gap discussed for a balanced education that can inculcate right values for the youth to fit into global community for greater good and welfare of many.*

**Key Words:** *Globalization, Hard skills, Soft Skills, Skills gap, Personality.*

**Introduction:** In today's, globalised world, the entire globe has come to be a single village due to technological advancement. However, this has happened more on a physical plane whereas it needs to embrace a global attitude for one another ensuring common human values what can be coined another way that we need to develop globalization of ideas. Soft skills' training has become a very common trend in all the educational institutions of higher learning across the world. From the internet sources and available books, it is found that the parameters chalked out are more or less common, but a question remains as to how far they are viable in building the characters of others and who the trainer is. In the context of true globalization, Swami Ranganathananda has elucidated that India has always practised and propagated three sciences namely, physical science, science of human values and spiritual science. The soft skills are otherwise the science of human values.

The physical science deals with the phenomenal world. The study of the nature and its forces are dealt in so many specialized branches and sub branches to make our relations with the material world more familiar. The second science deals with the relationship of one human being with the other. This does not come from any material content or the body. It is the mental process shaped by the factors of one's hereditary individual traits, the process of socialization and the environment one is put to. In the age of globalization, this science in the name of soft skills has gained importance as for the globalization of ideas one needs share certain values like love, compassion, toleration and accommodation. Indian scriptures are the storehouse of such values and the technique of developing it and for that matter one need not essentially be a believer in God or be spiritual seeker. These values are both secular and religious. Of course, the third science deals with our relationship with our own Self that is the Atman or God. But if we look at the world's religions, each one has propagated the same truth in different language for different people in different historical periods. The purpose is to perpetuate the common human values for the common goal of realizing perfection.

The present paper attempts to trace the need of soft skills training in Indian perspectives along with the growth of modern education system during the period of colonization. In post War era the world has witnessed a new chapter of human progress. The formation of UNO itself was a step for unifying the world as a common stage. Further, the formations of Euro or SAARC etc. are to consolidate the bonds in proximate regions. At the same



time, there is a seamy side of unemployment, wide chasm between the rich and the poor and more and more competition for progress across the world. India, the producer of highest technical work force in the world has to be prepared to face the challenges. The importance to intelligence quotient of earlier eras has shifted its focus to emotional quotient as the later helps one to make synergistic approach toward the organisational goal and the pursuit of soft skills is a means to that end. Representatives from industry and various organisations observe this across India that technical graduates require more soft skills like communication skills and leadership traits to fit into the organisation. We will now trace the growth of Indian education system and then come to the point of the parameters of soft skills and its development.

A close study of the rich history of India reveals a tradition of an indigenous and a well established system of education. The education was imparted to children with an aim of educating them in various skills that enabled them to successfully place themselves in the social matrix of the time. Gurukuls and ashramas were the focal centres of education in ancient India where the parents left their children till they completed their education. The guru (the teacher), usually an ascetic living a life of peace, sacrifice, piety, and truth imparted education in different skills based on the inclinations and aptitude of the pupils. Besides traditional skills like martial arts, fine arts, accounting, warfare, archery, medicine and priest ship, the gurus taught lessons from holy Vedic and Buddhist texts which were held as treasures of valuable information and enlightenment. The children were educated in a manner that they when sent to their respective societies proved useful and performed successfully their social, economic and religious duties. They were also supposed to preserve and enrich their culture and the education aimed at development of character and personality and cultivation of noble ideals. It was a time when people loved to live in perfect harmony and indulged in religious rituals, performed charity and enjoyed love, kindness and friendship.

The foreign invasions and frequent foreign attacks towards the medieval period of Indian history fostered among the local kings and monarchs a feeling of hatred, envy, and lust for power and accession of neighbouring territories. The harmony of the subcontinent was disturbed and a wane in the universal social human values system began to be manifested. A major shift in socio-political-economic conditions in the Indian subcontinent was quiet prominent and its direct impact fell on the education system. The intruders destroyed several schools, temples and ashrams as well as other centres of education and veneration. The famous Nalanda University, one of the earliest universities in the world was burned and destroyed during the period. Another impact of the foreign invasions was the amalgamation of culture in society. The introduction to the culture, religion and lifestyle of the intruders also influenced the locals and their education centres like Madrasas were established by the missionaries who came with the intruders. There was a considerable number of Madrasas during the pre-colonial Mughal period, which ran successfully besides traditional Gurukulas and ashrams. Later, the Britishers came to India and colonized India.

The colonial masters towards the early nineteenth century began to realize the need of a favourable education system for the aborigines if they wished to rule the country for ever. The introduction and implementation of English education was considered essential for easy interaction with the aborigines and the aim of education was to prepare able and competent employees for the ruling British government. Then the historic moment of Lord Macaulay's charter came. (Maheshwari, n.p.) The convent schools and missionary schools were established to serve the purpose. The better part of British education system was that unlike pre-colonial period education was no more a privilege of a lucky few but irrespective of caste, colour, creed, religion and sects pupils were admitted to newer kinds of schools and educated in languages, arts, history and geography and modern sciences. Lord Macaulay's reforms stressed the need of English education in India. Education, however, was still focussed on creating professionals for society and economy.

The post colonial or post independence India took more than a decade to make a fresh start and free itself from the colonial hangover. The first five year plan proposed of vital educational reforms and; goals in the direction of modernization of education. Beginning from the primary school level, government took gradual steps to improve education in India. Several plans like DPEP, RMSA, etc. were introduced and successfully executed to



meet the goals. However, the focus of education still lingers with the professional hard skills. The deviation from the human values education and growing stress on the technical skills appears a matter of grave concern as the complexity of modern technology has the potential to make or mar the entire humanity and therefore must be handled by people having sound technical knowledge and awareness of universal human values.

Through the last millennium, the world history has recorded several remarkable revolutions, battles and wars that have cast a lasting impact on the entire humanity for ages to come. Several revolutions, scientific discoveries and inventions have changed the face of the global humanity. The industrial developments on global scale, growth of global population, socio-economic conditions and severe environmental changes that the present age of humanity has mapped is at a stage where the entire human race is posited to a threat of being extinct in a next few centuries to come. The intellectuals and environmentalists have raised grave concern for the future and sustainable existence of the entire human race on the planet earth.

It is evident that education is an effective tool in facilitating both social and economic progress of an individual or a group by improving their functional and analytical ability that opens up opportunities for greater access to work and livelihoods. In order to meet the labour supply requirements of a rapidly developing nation, a properly educated and technically sound work force is quintessential. The expansion of globalization has posed both challenges as well as opportunities to world population and a skilful education is the only way to enable people to face these adeptly. India in its present context is a rapidly developing nation and its transition to a 'knowledge based economy' (Shafie: 120) is quite imminent. The competitive edge of the nation will be determined by the competence of its people to create, share and use knowledge more and more effectively and efficaciously. In order to achieve this goal, it is therefore necessary that a knowledge workforce with abilities to be more flexible, analytical, and adaptable and multi-skilled be developed. A knowledge economy requires its workforce to be well aware of a professional, managerial, operational, and behavioural, inter personal and inter functional skills.

It is therefore necessary that a flexible education and training system with ability to provide the foundation for learning at various levels of education for developing essential competencies as means of achieving lifelong learning should be adopted. According to the report in *knowledge paper*: "India is among the top countries in which employers are facing difficulty in filling up the jobs... The lack of available applicants, shortage of hard skills and shortage of suitable employability, including soft skills, are some of the key reasons in finding a suitable candidate for available jobs in the country"(n.p.). India as a fast developing country has begun to emerge as a country self-sufficient and self-reliant in simple as well as complex forms of technology. The development of a nation depends on its technological advancement, which in turn requires skilled work force at various levels. So, it was necessary that a lot of stress on technical skills education at various stages of education be laid. Realising this fact, Indian government has initiated various programmes for promoting technical education and awareness among people so that adequate skilled work force might be ensured. Newer ITIs, vocational schools, polytechnics and professional colleges are being established. Rajiv Kumar, Secretary General-FICCI, in the summary of his 'Knowledge Paper on Skill Development in India comments:

"The emphatic stress laid on education and training in this country, there is still a shortage of skilled manpower to address the mounting needs and demands of the economy. As an immediate necessity that has urgently arisen from the current scenario, the government is dedicatedly striving to initiate and achieve formal/informal skill development of the working population via education/vocational education/skill training and other upcoming learning methods(Knowledge paper: n.p.)."

Of late, the government of India is emphasising on skills development but more emphasis is given on technical skills. Technology and its advancement is necessary for the growth and development of a nation but there are instances galore that it has been misused or abused which has brought destruction to humanity. We require a balance of hard skills and soft skills so that technology is used safely and in proper direction. Already our



environment is in grave danger with growing greenhouse gases and global warming. Indian education system has focussed more on hard skills of science and technology. All round development means the increasing integration of technical skills with value based education combining all the international ideas, people and practices. Thus, the need of soft skills training is of utmost importance so that the technology may be used safely and in turn, it ensures universal values happiness and welfare.

With the changing time, availability of huge technical workforce, growing competition and saturation it is becoming difficult to get gainful employment. Many a times a fresh technical graduate becomes misfit in an organisation in absence of people skills. Students are now seeking soft skills training as it has become a trend now a day following the observations of experts of technical organisations and industries. Hard skills are academic skills, experience and level of expertise while soft skills are self-developed, interactive, communication, human and transferable skills. Literature suggests that 'hard skills contribute to only 15% of one's success while remaining 85% is made by soft skills' (Knowledge paper: n.p). Most employers these days want to hire retain and promote persons who are dependable, resourceful, ethical, self-directed, having effective communication, willing to work and learn and possess positive attitude. With the onset of economic liberalization, the Indian market is also becoming global. Therefore, the attributes of soft skills are to be inculcated by the educated mass to fit into national and international market. Understanding the importance of this newly raised important aspect, most of the educational institutions in India have initiated programmes, projects and activities for developing soft skills for the students.

Any individual as well as organization depends upon the awareness of both hard and soft skill for their successful progress. Soft skills, also known as people skills includes "communication, listening, engaging in dialogue, giving feedback, cooperating as a team member, solving problems, contributing in meeting and resolving conflicts" ( Omar et al). The curriculums designed for courses at various levels of conventional technical education and vocational training institutions primarily focus on employability skills, which consist of technical as well as soft skills .The soft skills or non-technical skills refer to the ability to handle customers/guests inquiries, maintaining professional and ethical standards, being flexible, responsible, and tolerant (Jungsun et al: 746). Fundamentally, employees who possess soft skills work well with others, and display a positive work attitude in a professional work setting. Technical skills are also referred to as work knowledge, for example computer-programming skills (Nilsson: 542). Further, in the current competitive job market, obtaining and retaining a job requires the right employability skills. (Shafie et al: 119).

Having discussed the various facets of soft skills, we can come back to the parameters of soft skills. In an era of professional expertise, possessing excellent intelligence is a criteria for success in professional life, but development of emotional or cognitive competencies with humane understandings has also become paramount important. The real key to the effectiveness of professionals is their ability to put their professional knowledge into effective practice, and in this context, soft skills have a crucial role to play. It enriches a person's social quotient and stimulates better career prospects. With this, we can state that development of soft skills has become an integral aspect of professional lives and must be considered and initiated from the root level by restructuring the technical curriculum by introducing courses regarding development of soft skills among technical students, while preparing them to meet the global challenges and complexities and enhancing their over-all personality. With this view in mind the following courses can be floated to develop the all-round personality of technical students as:

1. Introducing the concepts of intercultural Management
2. Preparing for Expatriation
3. International Professional Communication
4. Stress Management
5. Ecological Environmental Issues
6. Personality Development
7. Philosophy of Science



8. Introduction to Philosophy
9. Industrial Sociology
10. English for Specific Purposes
11. Intellectual Property Rights (Adams et al 2007).

Hard skills are a person's skill set and ability to perform a certain types of activities or tasks. Soft skills are a person's ability to interact effectively with co-workers and customers. Hard skills are mainly applicable at the work place. Soft skills are broadly applicable both at and outside the work place. It complements the hard skills, which are occupational requirement of a job. It also complements many other activities even outside the work place. Communication skills form the bedrock for soft skills as through it we create space for others to share ideas and information and vice versa. Soft skills inculcate in an individual the ability for intra personal skills for communication, which further helps inter personal communication. It also help mediating the skills gap between hard and soft skills. Skills gap is the expectations of others as to certain behavioural aspects from an individual.

Based on personal experience of teaching soft skills for last six years and modules designed for two national institutes of technology and the present institute of the level of an IIT, the author has evolved the following plan of teaching modules. These are being practised for teaching and the same is continued. The three sections are demarcated alphabetically for the ease of understanding.

**(a) Instructional Objectives:**

1. To develop inter personal skills and becoming an effective goal oriented team Player
2. To develop professionals with idealistic, practical and moral values
3. To develop communication and problem solving skills.
4. To re-engineer attitude and understand its influence on behaviour.

**(b) Methodology:**

(i) The teaching would be based on Learner Centric Approach (LCA) on or off camera through modules given in the course plan. Lectures, notes, power point slides, tutorials and hand -outs would also be provided. For facilitating community language teaching (CLT), the students would engage themselves completely into the practices of communication& Soft skills in an orderly manner and the teacher would be a facilitator so that each one finds it encouraging and motivating to speak and learn from peer group. Through activity, on camera or through the LCA activities and then on screen, students get to see and learn more from their mistakes. Thus, it enhances their performances. The faculty member/facilitator would show as to what might have been done to improve the skills. Teaching would require one Lecture and one tutorial class per week for the semester.

(ii) Materials would be supplied to the students by the concerned teacher as hand-outs whenever it is necessary. It would also help for theoretical references. Power point slides also would be made available for visual presentation on various topics.

01 Lecture	+	01 Tutorial	2 Hours per week
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**(C) Evaluation Process:** There would be three layers of evaluation out of 100 Marks:

- (i) Continuous Assessment- 30% Marks
- (ii) End Course Practical Test -40% Marks
- (iii) End Course Written Test-30% Marks



**Conclusion:** Soft skills are a person's individual talent and abilities that determine, how well, one suits in an environment. These are the inherent traits of an individual which can be enhanced further by proper training and guidance. In Indian curriculum, hard skills must be augmented with soft skills for the youth to fit into global market for gainful employment. Soft skills are increasingly sought out by employers in addition to standard qualification. There are instances of professions where soft skills proved to be more important, on a long term basis than technical skills. Increasing skills gap and demands of globalisation demand more soft skills or people skills and proper training with right training materials and trainer is sure step to enhance it.

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### A Brief Author Biography

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