

# ESSENTIAL SOFT SKILLS FOR TEACHING PROFESSION AS PERCEIVED BY THE PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

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**Abstract-** Like all other skilled professions there exist soft skills for teaching profession. The present study intends to identify the important soft skills required for teaching profession, hierarchy of those soft skills and compatibility of the soft skills for discharging duties as a teacher. Population of the study was pre-service teacher trainees of the B.Ed. colleges of West Bengal. The convenient sampling technique was used here. Sample size was 32. The tools used were (i) A questionnaire prepared and standardized by the investigators (ii) A list of soft skills for the teaching profession. Findings: (a) Personal soft skills are favoured in comparison to interpersonal ones. (b) A teacher with learning habit is most preferred. (c) Lack of any soft skill may spoil the effect of others.

**Keywords:** Soft skills, Teaching profession, Hierarchy of soft skills, Compatibility of the soft skills.

## Introduction:

Some fifty years ago technical or occupational skills and experience were sufficient for an individual to succeed in personal and professional or occupational life. Competition in the world gradually increased for success and a somewhat new parameter 'personality' came into play in deciding success. In this arena, a further new term soft-skills has been added over and above the earlier ones. The need of acquiring "soft skills," in addition to technical competencies, has garnered a lot of attention recently. The term "soft skills" refers to a collection of personal characteristics and interpersonal talents that help individuals to negotiate social and professional relationships in a successful manner.

Society expects value-based behaviours like honesty, integrity, excellence, tolerance, diligence, patience and all other personal characteristics from salesmen, air hostesses, bank employees, physicians, nurses and other service providers in our public life. These behaviours are interpreted as personal characteristics or 'personal soft skills' or value pattern of an individual. Society also expects good communication, empathy, etiquette, guidance, leadership etc. from them. These factors are often called 'interpersonal soft skills'.

Modern science has given birth to so many professions. There are some professions which are traditional and at the same time highly respectable among which the teaching profession is the most noteworthy. For a progressive society a teacher is indispensable like engineers, doctors, agriculturists. A teacher's behaviour help simulates learning among the students in the development of both academic and value aspects. Teachers' appropriate behaviour help bonding among school's students, teachers, guardians, head of the institution and management. Teachers in schools are selected mainly on the basis of their academic excellence. It has been observed on some occasions that, teachers with moderate academic excellence have been more successful and acceptable in profession in comparison to their counterparts who possess high academic excellence. This unexpected success of the mediocre teachers might be attributed to the soft skills they possess over and above their academic expertise.

No exhaustive list of soft skills for teaching profession has yet been available. Moreover, all the soft skills of the teachers are not required simultaneously in any teaching scenario. Different stake holders also expect different soft skills from the teachers for different problems. Pre-service secondary teachers' training institutes are dedicated to exploring, explaining and developing soft skills among the trainee teachers. It might be a worthwhile training to involve the trainee teachers to identify the most important soft skills for teaching profession and prioritise them.

## Related Studies:

Mohite et al. (2023) showed that the development of an individual's personal growth, interpersonal interactions, and professional accomplishments are all greatly impacted by their ability to acquire and improve their soft skills. [1] Susan (2019) observed that technical skills are no longer enough for workers to compete in this highly competitive global work environment. [2] Soft skills are of paramount importance. Cunff (2022) observed that in the most basic sense, hard

skills will get you the job, but soft skills will make you excel at it. Elmoutanna & Motii (2022) found that some soft skills depending on the subject of study are transferred from the university to workplace.[3]

Majid et al. (2012) found the importance of soft skills for education and career success.[4] Chondekar (2020) studied the significance and application of soft skill development in Teacher Education. He also developed a list of soft skills for teaching profession.[5]

Most of the studies are limited to the identification of essential soft skills for the success in the workplace in general. Studies on soft skills for teaching profession are few and far between. The available lists of soft skills for teaching profession do not throw much light on the relative importance of those skills. The knowledge of dominating soft skills seems to be important for the teachers to succeed in teaching profession. In pre-service teachers' training it is incumbent upon the training institutes to help trainees accordingly.

### Research Questions:

1. What are the important soft skills for teaching profession, as perceived by the pre-service teachers?
2. How do the pre-service teachers choose the compatible soft skills required for performing different tasks in teaching profession?

### Methodology:

#### Tools:

**Tool-1:** A questionnaire prepared on the 'soft skills' for teaching profession having two sections.

**Sections 1.1:** Contains 14 questions set on quality of teachers, teachers' action, and behaviours. Each question intends to elicit suitable/desirable soft skills of the teachers to tide over different situations in teaching profession.

**1.2:** There are 14 questions. Each question involves some critical situation against which two probable behaviours (so called options) of a teacher are noted. Respondent is to select any one of the options according to his/her own choice.

**Tool-2** A list of skills for teaching profession prepared by Chondekar (2020) was used, which contains in all 22 skills (13 for personal and 09 for inter personal soft skills) to determine the relative importance of them in the opinion of the pre service teachers.

**The content of the Questions of section 1.1** includes: Soft Skills (SS) for professional development; SS for accessibility to others; Personal SS of a teacher; Important Social Quality; Personal SS; SS and Teachers' Training; SS of self-made teacher; SS of Primary, Secondary & HS teacher. SS necessary for a school; SS necessary for Govt. & private schools; SS and selection of teachers.

**The content of the Questions of section 1.2** includes: some jobs of the teachers and two rival options for each. Respondents are to select one of them.

The opinions of the teacher educators, school-teachers and psychologists were sought for the improvement of the face validity and consistency of the tools 1 & 2.

**Population** for the study was pre-service teachers pursuing B.Ed. training in WB.

**Sampling:** Using convenient sampling 32 pre-service trainees of Govt. College of Education Banipur, North 24-Parganas, West Bengal, India just completing B.Ed. course, were selected.

**Data Collection:** Purpose of the study and technique of responding were critically discussed before respondents in a classroom for half an hour. The blank questionnaires were given them with a request to return the same filled in with their own well thought out and valuable responses, within two days.

#### Presentation & Analysis of Data:

**In part -1.1 of the questionnaire:** Each respondent gave only one response (most important in his or her opinion) against each question, by selecting the response from the tool 2. The different responses against each question were distributed over the 22 soft skills of tool 2. After receiving all the responses, the frequency of each soft skill was tabulated (Table 1).

**Table 1: Soft Skills and frequency distribution of responses over them [5]**

(The responses were given by 32 respondents (teacher trainees) against 14 questions in section 1.1 of the tool 1)

A. Personal Soft skills	Frequency(f) of Responses	Rank of the response
1. Learning skills /(Research and information management skills	79	I
2.Commitments / Responsibility	68	II
3.Professional ethics / Integrity	49	III
4. Tolerance to stress	09	XV

5.Self awareness	21	VII
6.Life balance	18	X
7.Cultural adaptability	13	XII
8.A Sense of Humour	06	XVI
9.Time Management	18	X
10.Optimism /Motivation	20	IX
11.Creativity Innovation)	21	VII
12.Adaptability to change	06	XVI
13.Decision making	24	V
<b>B. Inter-personal Soft Skills:</b>		
1. Communication	39	IV
2.Empathy	12	XIII
3.Team-work	02	XIX
4.Leadership / Guidance	22	VI
5.Negotiation	00	XXII
6.Good manners & Etiquette	06	XVI
7.Conflict management	02	XIX
8.Contact Network	02	XIX
9.Problem Solving	11	XIV

$$\sum f = 352 + 96 = 448$$

### Analysis of Responses of Table 1

#### Analysis (1) *Relative weights of Groups A & B of tool 2 in terms of recorded responses*

Total number of responses recorded

= No. of respondents x No. of questions = 32 x 14 = 448

The number of responses recorded in the Group A = 352, No of soft skills = 13

The number of responses recorded in the Group B = 96, No of soft skills = 09

Average no. of responses per skill in Gr. A =  $352/13 = 27$  nearly

Average no. of responses per skill in Gr. B =  $96/9 = 11$  nearly

(i) The no. of responses in the group A is proportionately high.

(ii) Personal soft skills (in Gr A) of a teacher are more emphasized.

#### Analysis (2) Selection of the important soft skills

Total no. of soft skills =  $13 + 9 = 22$

The average no. of responses against each soft skill =

total no. of responses / total no. of soft skills =  $448/22 = 20.36$

If the no. responses against a skill is  $\geq 20.36$ , the skill will be considered important.

For each of the skills (A1, A2, A3, A5, A11, A13) and (B1, B4) the no. of responses is above 20.36 (Table 1). Hence these soft skills are of primary importance for teaching profession.

**Table 2: Compatibility of different Soft Skills for teaching profession** (cf. questions of section 1.2)

Questions sl.	Nature of the questions	a% (% of responses in 1 <sup>st</sup> option)	b% (% of responses in 2 <sup>nd</sup> option)	The most preferred behaviour	Rejected behaviours
15	Development of schools	65.00	35.00	Mediocre, honest, submissive	Gifted, arrogant, indifferent
16	Preference for teachers	59.00	41.00	Sociable, mediocre	Problem solver, ego, self-centred
17	Acceptability of a teacher	85.00	15.00	Sociable, mediocre	Greedy, impulsive, gifted

18	Empathetic behaviour of a teacher	78.50	21.50	Friendly to orphan and first-generation students	Dedicated to acquiring new knowledge
19	Scientific Temperament of a teacher	75.00	25.00	Guiding students	Eloquent and thoughtful
20	Punctuality of a teacher	75.00	25.00	Punctual, Moderate	Irregular, expert
21	Teaching efficiency of a teacher	60.00	40.00	Honest, Simple	Greedy, expert
22	Honesty of a teacher	14.00	86.00	Dutiful, student friendly	Nonadjustable, Research oriented
23	Outlook of a teacher	84.50	15.50	Optimistic, problem solver	Creative, intolerant
24	Duties of a Headmaster	12.50	87.50	Planning improvement of teaching learning and evaluation	Utterly busy in administration
25	Decision making quality of a teacher	81.00	19.00	To see students' interest first	Stick to own programme
26	Interest of a teacher	76.00	24.00	Interested, Accommodating	Indifferent, sense of humour
27	Courtesy of a teacher	81.50	18.50	Spontaneous courtesy	Courtesy in selected cases
28	Self-responsibility of a teacher	37.50	62.50	Exchange valuable journals	Delay return of library books

### Analysis of some Sample Responses in Table 2

- Gifted teacher is an asset of a school. But if the teacher is arrogant and indifferent, he becomes a liability. In that case a mediocre teacher with honesty and submissiveness is preferred (65%) [Ref: question no. 15]
  - An expert teacher is desirable but if the teacher at the same time is greedy, s/he becomes undesirable. In that situation a moderately qualified and honest teacher is more desirable (60% opinion). [Ref: question no. 21]
  - Everyone likes humour from teacher but not indifference. An indifferent humourist teacher can't touch the heart of students. So, a caring and accommodating teacher is preferred, even if he not humourist. [Ref: question no. 26]
- All these will go to show that no quality of a teacher, in isolation, is sufficient to declare the teacher to be acceptable to the clientele unless he is evaluated in terms of his gross behaviour. An expert teacher is highly necessary for an educational institution but not an expert teacher without integrity.

### FINDINGS:

#### For Research Questions 1:

1.1. Personal skills are assumed to be more significant than inter-personal ones for teaching profession.

1.2. The personal and inter-personal soft skills found to be very important in teaching profession are:

#### ▪ Personal

Learning skills (Research and information management skills)

Commitments, Responsibility

Professional ethics / Integrity

Self-awareness

Creativity/ Innovation

Decision making

#### ▪ Inter-personal

Communication with clientele

Leadership/ Guidance

#### 1.3. Hierarchy (high to low) of soft skills for teaching profession

- **Personal Soft Skills:** Learning skills (Research and information management skills, Commitments, Responsibility, Professional ethics / Integrity, Decision making, Self-awareness, Creativity & Innovation, Life balance, Time Management, Optimism, Cultural adaptability, Tolerance to stress, A Sense of Humour, Adaptability to change.

- **Inter-Personal Soft Skills:** Communication, Tolerance to stress, Empathy, Problem Solving, Good manners & Etiquette, Team-work, Conflict management, Contact Network & Negotiation

### **For Research Questions 2:**

For a teacher no soft skill should be assessed in exclusion of others. If a teacher has a good extent of a particular soft skill/behaviour along with one or more detrimental ones, the soft skill /good behaviour will come to no use. Teachers should be assessed in terms of their gross behaviour.

### **Discussion:**

Teacher behaviours which are mostly classroom centric actions can't be equated with soft skills which are mostly value oriented. Now a days teacher is not simply a classroom entity but an agent of the corporate world where he has to perpetually balance between school and outside for the best interest of the development of education and pupils. That is why, a teacher has to acquire necessary soft skills that can navigate her/him in working world.

Many researchers, educational thinkers and curriculum developers have prescribed different soft skills for the teachers, but all are not necessary for a particular teacher or a particular task. Again all the soft skills, so developed, are not accepted by all the teachers, all the time with same eye.

Priority on the soft skills of teachers, as envisaged by the stakeholders, depend on the process of transaction of education in schools and the expectation of the society. The perception about soft skills of teachers in a society where good scores are expected as a result of learning can't be same as where society expects good performance.

The perception of trainee teachers, as found in the study, might be developed as a result of expectation in their school life, their practice during internship in teachers' training etc. However the importance of the soft skills and hierarchy of them could be more reliably revealed if the sample were large and random.

### **Conclusion:**

Teaching at school level needs some preferred soft skills both personal and interpersonal for a successful development of students, school and school community. Inter-personal soft skills of teachers predominantly motivate learners to be academic and interested to co-scholastic activities. Socialisation of learners might be possible by the effect of inter-personal soft skills of the teachers. Development of soft skills like cooperative learning, peer group learning, empathetic behaviour, leadership qualities, generous behaviour, reasoning abilities and scientific temperament within the school campus basically depends on such behaviour or soft skills of the teachers and the head of the institution. Trainee teachers prefer to develop all such soft skills in themselves in their teachers' training programme successfully to get the job and to adjust themselves in their profession at schools. The personal skills of teachers help develop values among the teachers. A learning teacher can only develop learning habits among the students. As both personal and inter-personal soft skills have joint effect on the academic domain, all the skills should go together.

### **Recommendation:**

1. Teacher education programme at every level must include in curriculum both theory and practicum content for developing soft skills among trainee teachers.
2. Teacher educators must be very much oriented and trained to develop both personal and interpersonal soft skills among the trainee teachers.
3. In teaching internship these soft skills developments must be evaluated so that trainee teachers could be well equipped with different soft skills and their implementation in real situation.

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