



## **Importance of Soft Skills for Undergraduate and Post Graduate Students in Tertiary Institutions**

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### **ABSTRACT**

All occupations can benefit from soft skills, commonly referred to as power skills, common skills, or core talents. Soft skills are those that everyone possesses naturally and uniquely. Communication, teamwork, problem solving, creativity, emotional intelligence, leadership, flexibility, time management, organization, conflict resolution, critical thinking, project management, interpersonal communication, active listening, work ethics, decision-making, collaboration, and management are examples of soft skills. Other soft skills include persuasion, empathy, and flexibility. Hard talents, on the other hand, are those that are learned by practical experience, instruction, or education. A team's and a company's success depends on more than simply its employees' technical proficiency. Soft talents enable employees to fully utilize their hard abilities, yet it also depends on how they engage with clients and one another. In the workplace, abilities like dispute resolution, emotional intelligence, time management, and functioning well under pressure are crucial. Soft skill workers make for effective supervisors and good team players. They are able to establish relationships well and are friendlier. They may advance in their position and in their firm, and they make effective brand ambassadors. Employers should evaluate candidates for both hard and soft skills during the hiring process, depending on the position. The business can also wish to assist current workers in acquiring the soft skills they require.

**Keywords:** soft skills, hard skills, interpersonal skills, communication, responsibility, integrity, courtesy.

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### **Introduction**

Soft skills are also known as noncognitive, interpersonal, and core competencies. Soft skills are character qualities and personality traits that show how a person interacts with the world in general, other people, and themselves (South Dakota department of education, 2021). Both for their academic work and for their future employment, students must develop a wide range of soft skills. Students who understand the value of soft skills early on are better able to master their studies, complete their academic obligations without incident, make more friends who may be helpful in the future, and better represent themselves to teachers who may also have a significant impact on their careers (Allison Academy, 2022). Soft skills should be developed by students for the benefit of their education and future employment because they are directly related to better academic performance. It is crucial that students develop desirable and suitable kinds of conduct, qualities, and skills to match their social and academic position because they will eventually join the ranks of academic citizens after graduating. They should, then, set an example of a mature, balanced person who possesses the characteristics and qualities that are expected of someone with their education. Students are prepared for their future professional duties that is, the positions of authorities in the disciplines they have chosen during their studies. With that in mind, the significance of soft skills for students is fairly obvious, as the next step is finding a job where they are expected to behave appropriately towards their coworkers, to be able to express their thoughts and feelings, to be cooperative, accommodating, and capable of teamwork, to possess stable ethical principles to guide them, to be cordial and assertive, to be professional and principled in interpersonal relationships, and more.

Soft skills are even more crucial for students to gain for their future professional responsibilities because the goal is to prepare them for their chosen professional vocation during their studies. For these reasons, students should start working on their soft skills right away. Despite the fact that there are many examples of soft skills, some of the most common ones are communication, teamwork, problem solving, creativity, emotional intelligence, leadership, adaptability, time management, organization, conflict resolution, critical thinking, project management, interpersonal communication, active listening, work ethics, decision making, collaboration, management, dependability, persuasion, empathy, and flexibility. Hard skills, also known as technical skills, are acquired via education, training, and practical experience in a particular field. Hard skills include things like computer programming, culinary competence, and linguistic proficiency. No matter the field of study or the place of employment, soft skills can be applied across all levels of education and employment.

According to Macquail, Umi, and Hutkemri (2021), many free programs that teach soft skills provide middle school-level tasks that are both high interest and age-appropriate, allowing children to consider and reflect on their own soft skill development. Yet, integrating development into all facets of the curriculum is the most effective strategy to improve students' soft skills. The following tactics are used to help pupils strengthen their soft skills:

1. Integrity: Encourage integrity by adding group projects into lessons. Each group member ought to be in charge of a certain task or result. The teacher should ask the students to reflect on how they contributed to the work and why they want a piece of the final grade at the conclusion of the group project.
2. Communication: Students' communication abilities should be developed through group discussions, writing for real audiences, and public speaking. Throughout a class discussion, they should be able to exhibit academically fruitful speech.
3. Courtesy: Demand that students treat one another with respect and decorum both in the classroom and when working on projects with others online. One technique for encouraging respectful and polite conversation is accountable discourse (Fuglei, 2023).
4. Responsibility: It is not advisable to teach responsibility by giving zero points for being late or skipping class. Pupils who don't turn in their work should be asked to justify their actions and outline how they'll avoid making the same mistakes in the future. If a student wants to turn in their work late, they must ask for the extension rather than suggesting it.
5. Professionalism: Encourage professionalism by having students adhere to the class's standards, which include being on time, prepared, and considerate of others. completing tasks and modifying text to meet audience demands.
6. Flexibility: Let students to choose how long-term, problem-based projects should be completed within predetermined boundaries and interim deadlines. They will be inspired by these exercises to be organized, focused, and capable of problem-solving and self-auditing.
7. Teamwork: Promote teamwork and collaboration by giving diverse pupils the opportunity to work together in groups. Place a strong emphasis on cooperation, communication, integrity, and responsibility. Teachers can encourage the development of soft skills outside the classroom by giving students the chance to tour workplaces or take part in job shadowing activities. But modeling soft skills is the quickest and most effective approach to teach them. Students learn the value of soft skills and how to use them in real-life circumstances when they consistently observe professionals who exhibit these abilities by working together, showing respect for students and other teachers, communicating effectively, being on time, and being prepared.

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### **The following are why soft skills are important:**

While engaging with those around us, soft skills are crucial. Soft skills are essential in both one's personal and professional life and are the cornerstone of establishing strong relationships. These abilities make it simpler to establish connections, build dependability and trust with others, whether they are coworkers or family members, and to lead teams (Will, 2022).

1. Employability is improved by soft skills: Employers emphasize dependability and reliability in candidates, as well as integrity, communication abilities, and adaptability, which are largely regarded as soft skills.
2. Success is predicted by soft abilities, even in highly technology settings.
3. Adaptability is necessary for survival in today's workplace. The workplace is continually changing at a quick rate, and an individual's capacity to adapt will influence their likelihood of keeping up. It is crucial for students to learn how to handle a variety of workloads and projects with ease, juggle many commitments, and produce excellent products on time because roles and duties are becoming more complex and there is less time to learn on the job.
4. Effective leaders have strong interpersonal skills, which elevate ordinary employees to positions of leadership in the future. One's success in managing a team to complete a project depends on their capacity to connect with others. Also, demonstrating empathy and attentiveness to clients demonstrates a genuine desire to address their needs or find solutions to their problems.
5. Soft skills help a student's hard skills to shine: even with an astonishing variety of technical skills that may open doors, success depends on a person's soft skills. The capacity to cooperate, plan, and interact with others will increase one's effectiveness. Soft talents enable people to more effectively brainstorm, negotiate, solicit support from others, and collaborate on projects together (Singapore Institute of Management, 2020).
6. Developing learning soft skills can help kids succeed in school and in their future employment, according to the Indeed Editorial Team (2021). Students' abilities can instruct students on how to think creatively, solve challenging problems, and communicate well in a

classroom setting. These abilities might be listed on a resume to highlight a student's qualifications for a job. Many of these abilities are adaptable to other roles.

According to Suman (2022), running a business requires soft skills for the reasons listed below:

Soft skills enhance decision-making in the following ways:

1. They lead to positive change.
2. They foster a positive work atmosphere.
3. They facilitate problem-solving.
4. It enhances client service
5. It boosts sales
6. Soft skills help retain employees

Hayes (2022) lists the following advantages of training in soft skills:

1. Soft skills support teamwork,
2. improve engagement,
3. boost customer happiness, among other things.
4. Improve brand reputation

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## **Theoretical Review**

Kluger and Denisi assert that three theories—control theory, goal theory, and attribution theory—appear to exist and have the potential to direct and inform research and thought regarding the cognitive, emotional, and social aspects of soft skills (Gibbs, 2013).

### ***Control theory***

Control theory is an area of applied mathematics that deals with using feedback to modify a system's behavior in order to accomplish a specific objective. There are two types of systems that can be distinguished for which control theory is essential: man-made systems and biological systems. According to the control hypothesis, every human conduct has a purpose and is motivated by certain wants, including those for power, freedom, fun, and survival.

Control theory is the first theory that has been observed and is potentially pertinent for studying soft skills assessment (Carver & Scheier, 1982). Control theory uses systems and control loops to describe and explain behavior. The theory's major flaw is that it ignores other ideas like autonomy and impulsiveness in favor of giving too much weight to ties between an individual and society. The weak ties between the individual and society, according to control theory, are what cause people to stray. It serves as a sort of catch-all phrase for a variety of analytical methods and approaches utilized in the management of mathematical systems. Since many of the problems that can be solved can also be represented as a dynamical system, much of this subject is connected to system theory.

### ***Goal theory***

Goal theory suggests that there will be difficulties in assessing soft skills when learners and assessors choose and use objectives that do not fit the ideal profile and are not properly established. In accordance with goal setting theory, productivity can be increased by defining clear, quantifiable goals. This hypothesis contends that measurable, explicit goals outperform vague ones in terms of effectiveness. Locke (1968) underlined the importance of creating specific goals. As a result of having to work hard and advance their skills to complete these increasingly challenging targets, employees experience good feedback and a sense of overall accomplishment. Improved employee satisfaction, productivity, and engagement at work may follow from this. Setting goals can boost workplace engagement among employees. This theory offers a clear roadmap for how to define and accomplish goals in an efficient manner. Setting goals increases motivation and effort, which boosts employee performance. Setting goals enables regular, positive feedback, which helps staff continue to get better. Employees feel a sense of overall success after defining and achieving goals, which can improve morale and workplace satisfaction. Goals as well as the reality that employees perform at their best when given difficult tasks.

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### ***Attribution theory***

The attribution theory, put forth by Fritz Heider in 1958, examines how people relate to one another and interpret the social reality. More precisely, it is focused on how people interpret events and how those interpretations influence their way of thinking and doing (Gordon, 2022). The attribution theory is concerned with how people process information, understand events, and determine what causes what. No one would choose a course of action or make a choice without putting a cause or factor behind it. This evaluates the justifications people make for particular activities; it takes into account how people understand their own behavior. It is believed that both internal and external variables influence every behavior:

1. External attribution or situational attribution: In this case, a factor, agent, or force from the outside is blamed for the event. A person's behavior is impacted by, constrained by, or even entirely dictated by events outside of their control. One such component is the weather.
2. Internal attribution, also known as dispositional attribution, assigns causality to an internal force, agent, or element. One has personal control over internal variables. A person has the option of acting in a certain way or not. So, factors beyond a person's control, such as their own intelligence, do not limit, affect, or even entirely determine their behavior. According to the attribution theory, an individual displays creativity when interacting with other individuals and outside stimuli (Gordon, 2022).

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### **Application of the idea of attribution**

According to attribution theory, high achievers would approach rather than avoid tasks that need achievement because they are certain that success is the result of high talent and effort and that failure is the result of unlucky circumstances or a subpar exam, i.e., not a person's fault. Consequently, success increases pride and confidence whereas failure has little impact on a person's sense of self. Low achievers, on the other hand, steer clear of success-related tasks because they tend to have self-doubt and/or believe that success is dependent on chance or other uncontrollable variables. Hence, even when successful, the low achiever does not feel as rewarded since he or she does not feel accountable, which means that it does not boost his or her pride and confidence. Students and teachers in the classroom are driven to comprehend the reasons behind certain events in the classroom and at school. The attribution process refers to the theory that if a student notices that another student receives an award ahead of them, they may ascribe this to their color, gender, etc., and conclude that they have no chance of receiving the same reward. According to the idea of attribution, people's motivation and conduct are greatly influenced by the assumptions they make about what causes their successes and failures. With regard to students, they frequently ponder why they did well on a task or poorly on it (Khali, 2017).

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### **How soft skills can assist students in their career search**

For many university students, the world of employment may seem far away, but Stephanie (2021) asserts that during the next few years, the student will graduate with a degree with the hopes of entering the workforce. Even while attending college is mostly about receiving a degree, it is becoming clear that soon-to-be graduates should also have a bank of soft skills, as these are all essential in the modern workplace. Employers are therefore looking for applicants that are well-rounded, have good interpersonal skills, take initiative, are responsible, and can work effectively in teams. Unfortunately, many recent grads who are actively seeking employment may struggle as a result of their lack of soft skills under these conditions.

The workplace is an interpersonal setting where connections must be made and nurtured, viewpoints must be shared, and occasionally disagreements must be settled. In order to function and succeed in teams and in organizations as a whole, individuals must possess soft skills. Hard skills are simpler to define and assess than soft skills, which are essentially character qualities and are frequently referred to as transferrable skills. Employers regularly look for soft skills in new workers, including the capacity to show a strong work ethic, compassion, understanding, diversity, emotional intelligence, and the capacity to accept and appreciate differences. These softer abilities and attitudes are essential for a talent to have a natural propensity to improve both personally and professionally. They play a crucial role in fostering an atmosphere of diversity and empathetic cooperation where individuals are expected to operate as a cohesive unit and support one another in carrying out worthwhile tasks. The teaching of employability skills should therefore be incorporated into the university curriculum revision for the benefit of the students. A student can set themselves apart in the hiring process if they have learned these skills and, ideally, put some of them into practice while enrolled in college.

Soft skills in the workplace enable organizations to employ their technical expertise and knowledge effectively and efficiently without being constrained by interpersonal conflicts, office politics, and negative public and market impressions. The correct combination of soft talents requires careful planning and recruitment tactics. Moreover, time, patience, and gut feeling are needed (Dyson, 2022).

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### **Conclusions**

Soft skills refer to non-technical abilities that describe a person's way of working and relating to others. In contrast to hard talents like data analytics or programming, soft skills are not always something a person will study in a school. Instead, they are a reflection of a person's communication,

work, and work ethic. Understanding the difference between hard talents and soft skills, as well as why both are crucial, is essential to landing a job in any industry. Ordinary workers are distinguished for future leadership roles by their soft skills. One's success in managing a team to complete a project depends on their capacity to connect with others. Also, demonstrating empathy and attentiveness to clients demonstrates a genuine desire to address their needs or find solutions to their problems.

### **Way Forward**

The researchers recommended the following steps for students in the profession based on their findings:

1. Pupils need to improve their soft skills
2. Learners should hone their communication abilities
3. students should hone their leadership abilities
4. A positive outlook should be adopted
5. Students should develop flexibility

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