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**A STUDY ON STUDENT'S PERCEPTION TOWARDS
THE NEED OF SOFT SKILLS IN PROFESSIONAL COURSES
IN MORADABAD REGION IN UTTAR PRADESH**

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ABSTRACT

A soft skill is a new way to describe a set of abilities or talents that an individual can bring to the workplace. It characterizes certain career attributes that individuals may possess like ability to work on a team, effective communication skills, excellent leadership skills and understanding of professional ethics. Experts believe that today a lot of professional students are unemployed as they earn the certifications, but the right attitude and values which are required in a workplace are missing. Thus there is a great need for bridging the gap between the skills delivered in academics and the skills required in a workplace. The training of soft skills helps the students to face the challenges in their workplace and for their professional growth in future. This paper attempts to analyze the perception of the students on the need of learning soft skills to cope with their professional life. On the basis of



survey method, a study has been conducted on 312 students of professional courses. Primary data has been collected through a self made questionnaire 'Perception scale for the need of soft skills in professional students'. Since the data for analysis is primary in nature and sample size is varied for various sample units, therefore as per the response rate chi square test is applied. The significance level 0.05 has been selected for this test due to the nature of data and result. After analyzing the data it has been concluded

that the students have an immense need of learning soft skills to work effectively in their future workplace. The present study is confined to the students of different professional courses of private and government colleges in Moradabad region in Uttar Pradesh.

KEYWORDS : *soft skills, professional students, academics, workplace..*

INTRODUCTION :

According to the different educationists and scholars, education is a focused, constant, dynamic and social process through which people can develop their innate powers to adjust with their external world. The process of education has some well defined objectives and goals which include (i) making people well attuned and adapted with existing values and expectations, (ii) developing them morally high so that they can acquire more capacities to mould their self when needed, (iii) giving them technical and advanced education and (iv) making their attitudes and ideas more rational and

logical, so that they can learn self control. Thus, without formal education, it is not possible to get all the resources and achievements of a complex society. Now a day's at higher level many professional courses develop their students according to their interest and capacity of learning. They must also be developed with soft skills along with hard skills, which are needed in their future workplace.

Hard skills mean the technical skills to complete any responsibility. Soft skills include well developed personality, good dressing sense and office etiquettes, correct body language, effective communication skills, stress management skills, understanding for professional ethics and the ability to discuss in a group logically. Students are trained to handle machines, issues but they are never taught to deal with people who are the most important component of any organization. They should be developed both with hard and soft skills in their professional courses which is essential for their personal and professional growth.

As the corporate world is expanding its wings in all the directions, the clients and employees both need strong interpersonal skills to communicate with each other in an effective manner. These skills have become an important criteria for the selection of employees both in domestic and multinational companies. The students weak with soft skills cannot survive for a long time in any workplace. Shiv Khera (2011), a motivational speaker and founder of Qualified Learning System Inc. USA stated in his article published in Times of India that "We are hired for our technical skills, but fired for the lack of soft skills". Thus in today's competitive business world soft skills mixed with hard skills are a perfect recipe to be successful.

Seeing its importance many top colleges of professional courses have added a compulsory training of soft skills in their course structure. The main aim of this training is to develop major key skills in the students such as good dressing sense and office etiquette, spoken English, communication skills, effective use of body language while communicating with others, professional ethics at work place, ways to manage the stress in personal and professional life, group discussion to put forward their unique ideas and the presentation skills to present their content effectively by using technology for their personal and professional growth. The professional colleges play a great role in the development of a country by giving the training of soft skills to their student to contribute in the development of a nation.

NEED OF STUDY

'Soft skills' is a term used by sociologists to describe the emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills that characterize our relationships with other people. In any workplace, soft skills affect every level of an organization from its executive leadership and management teams to full-time employees and contract workers. Soft skills are essential to a workforce because they not only bring value to an organization and its clients but also develop and sharpen skills that are crucial for the success in their workplace. Recognizing the high return on investment by soft-skills training many companies have started providing such training to its executive leadership and management teams which helps workers to learn the interpersonal and psychosocial skills. Thus it is essential for the universities to understand the need and proper training of soft skills in professional courses.

The government of India is spending tremendous investments on education; but it is still receiving minimal returns because there is a gap between the soft skills possessed by the professional students and the soft skills required by the industries and the organizations. Today university education is being criticized as being too theoretical while employers are searching for employees who reflect competency in soft skills. Many job opportunities remain vacant in spite of the high unemployment rate of the university professional students. Therefore higher institutions must consider the development

of soft skills based education in response to reform traditional education systems which appear to be out dated with the realities and challenges of modern social and economic life. Educationists, principals and teachers have become more aware that teaching soft skills for professionals and personal success is as important as developing academic capability and are emphasizing greatly on the importance and need of soft skills. Thus to cope with the increasing demands and challenges of the industries it has become a requisite to train the professional students with the soft skills.

Students of different professional courses come from different backgrounds. Some students come from rural areas with Hindi medium while others come from urban areas with English medium. Professional courses require spoken English other than content. There has been a great demand of an integrated set of LSRW skill (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in professional students to survive in their future workplace. Professional students also need to develop a good dressing sense and office etiquettes to bring professional cohesiveness and work productivity in their respective field of job. Now a day's it has been observed that girls are also pursuing professional course. They must understand the importance of dress code to gain respect and office etiquettes to build up interpersonal relationship in their profession lives. Professional students also need to develop their leadership skills to work effectively in a group and to unite the team in right direction to achieve the goals of an organization.

Another important skill that one must have is stress management. Professional students are also taught to manage their stress through different stress management techniques which help an employee to improve their work productivity by balancing their personal and professional life. They also need to learn the code of conduct to understand the difference between right and wrong deeds which they learn from the training of professional ethics. Thus in the training of soft skills they learn each and every skill which is essential for their personal and professional growth. Universities are trying to nurture their students in different ways to groom them well to make them employable. Wats, Meenu & Rakesh (2008), Jain & Mehta (2011), Sripala, B. & Praveen (2011), Rao, Kesva (2012), Padmaja (2012), Goel and Goel (2012), have emphasized in their research to reduce the yawning gap between industry requirements and the present inadequate skill levels of the students in professional courses. But they have not given any views regarding the need of the students coming from different backgrounds. There has been a need of tailoring the curriculum of professional colleges to meet the need of these students. Seeing the variety of the students in a class some questions arise in the mind of researcher are as follow-

- Do the students of different professional courses (MBA, MCA, B.Ed, M.Ed) feel that they need the training of soft skills for their professional success?
- Do the students from different age feel the same?
- Do the students from urban and rural background feel the same?
- Do girls and boys have same views regarding the need of the soft skills?
- Do the students from different boards feel the same?
- Do the students of different streams feel the same?
- Do the students of Hindi and English medium feel the same?

The researcher selected a topic 'A study on student's perception towards the need of soft skills in professional courses in Moradabad region in Uttar' to find the answers of above questions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many authors have emphasised in their research that the soft skills are basic necessity of the professional students to cope up with their professional life. There must be a compulsory training for the students in various professional courses to develop their soft skills and to get success in their professional life. Some of the related literature reviews on the need of learning soft skills in professional course have been summarized and presented here under the following categories:

- Indian Researches
- Foreign Researches

INDIAN RESEARCHES

Jain, Vishal (2009) emphasized on the need of soft skills in his article "Importance of soft skills development in education". The purpose of this article is (i) to make awareness among the scholars for the need of vast research and, (ii) to seek expert opinions to determine the specific soft skills to be implemented and used in higher institutions of learning. It adopts a qualitative approach using a combination of methods such as the long interview, secondary sources research and actual observation. Based on the research findings obtained, (i) seven soft skills have been identified and chosen to be implemented in all institutions of higher learning. They are: communication skills, thinking skills and problem solving skills, team work force, life-long learning and information management, entrepreneur skills, ethics, moral and professionalism and leadership skills.(ii) these skills must be acquired by each and every individual in the institutions of higher learning without which, the student is regarded as incompetent and these skills are regarded as the additional generic skills and a bonus to the students, (iii) a carefully designed and well planned education system is critical to develop such human capital, thus, institution of higher education plays a very important role to produce a human capital that is highly knowledgeable and skilful to meet the demand and expectations of many people, (iv) the teaching and learning processes in institution of higher learning should be capable to provide such knowledge and skills to future graduate.

Jain, A. & Mehta, S. (2011) submitted a research paper on the topic "Increasing the employability quotient by equipping better soft skills". They emphasized that today employers crave managers with the critical soft skills. These skills tend to be more generic in nature. In other words these are skills, key to effective performance across all job categories. And these soft skills have come to play an even more crucial role in management positions in today's environment. As the world has changed and the nature of work has changed, the skill set required for managers has changes. The main objectives of this paper are (i) to see the difference of skill gap between the skills needed on the job and the skills possessed by the applicants, (ii) to access the need of the training to develop soft skills among the employees. In this paper secondary data analysis was used for conducting research. The tool used for the research was "Literature Survey". The study revealed that (i) soft skills' training encompass a whole range of skills, including assertiveness, influencing and persuading, negotiating, presenting and public speaking, networking and managing a team. Overall, it is a gaining a better understanding of the way people think and behave, and presenting themselves and their ideas in a way that will have the best impact. (ii) soft skills training should be tailored to take into account the experience, situations and personality of the delegates. A pre course questionnaire can help to establish these things and a good trainer will adopt his approach accordingly. (iii) A successful training session will also get the balance between theory on one hand and practice and interaction on the other hand. After all it's all about how you work with people and you can't learn that just by listening.

Vijayalakshmi, N.S. (2011) conducted a research on the topic "Soft skills- A management introspects of an Indian techie". The purpose of this paper was (i) to emphasize that being good at number crunching and scoring high marks in subjects are not the only criteria for success in professional or personal life, (ii) to call attention to that soft skills are must to be globally competitive. It adopts a qualitative approach using a combination of methods such as the secondary sources research and actual observation. The author explained that soft skills are fast becoming the deal breaker in many of today's hiring decisions. The findings of the study are that technical skills alone do not suffice a person to be globally competitive. The wide rivers of culture, language and environment can only be crossed by being proficient with soft skills that improve self-awareness enhancing socio-emotional adjustment in the society.

Agrawal, A. (2014) explored in his thesis on the topic "Study of developments and challenges involved in soft skills training in professional colleges" that there is a need to diagnose the pattern of skill development and personal development initiatives (education, training, etc). With rapid expansion of professional education system in India, it is alarming if we follow more of ineffective practices, which seems to be the case as one (among many) of the news items indicates - only 2.6% of engineering pass-outs are really employable. Employers are also frustrated with level of skills and commitments from freshers. The research has been able to bring out successfully a model named 4-Q Model for Soft Skills Development. This Model can be used for reference for trainee assessment, soft-skills strategy, curriculum design, self-paced learning; and for further research; within Business Management education.

FOREIGN RESEARCHES

Zhang, A. (2012) emphasized in his research paper "Peer Assessment of Soft skills and Hard Skills" that both the information technology (IT) industry and the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) demand soft-skill training in higher education and require IT graduates to demonstrate competence in interpersonal communication, teamwork, and conflict management. This study aimed (i) to promote soft-skill training by designing and validating a peer assessment scale, (ii) describe challenges and demands faced by educators (iii) to prove valuable for educators to promote soft-skill training in an active learning environment and (iv) to use peer evaluations to achieve success in IT education. This study designed a peer assessment scale for soft-skill and hard-skill evaluations. The assessment scale was administrated on a small sample size of 24 students in an IT course and data was collected. To ensure sampling adequacy, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's tests were conducted. Two dimensions, soft-skill and hard-skill, emerged from factor analysis and captured 67 percent of variance. Items on the assessment scale passed a reliability test with Cronbach's α values greater than 0.70. The findings of the study are that (i) students majoring in IT are hard-skill orientated or that our IT program emphasizes hard skills over soft skills, (ii) Group projects provide teamwork environment for soft-skill training, but individual performance of group members is difficult to access. IT education should prepare future IT professionals with hard skills to communicate with end users, to resolve conflicts, and to bring functions together towards common goal.

Pereira, O. P. (2013) explored in his research paper on the topic "Soft skills: From university to the work environment, Analysis of a survey of graduate in Portugal", that there is a gap between the soft skills acquired by the professional students in their colleges and the soft skills required in a workplace. Results demonstrate a significant difference in perception, which might reveal a structural maladjustment in the interaction between universities and enterprises. A questionnaire was used, designed in a Likert scale, which was handed out to graduates of different universities and different

areas of knowledge. The outcome of the study indicates the importance of new thoughts on corporate needs. It also indicate the need to reflect upon the role of University, repositioning it in the centre of society as an Institution which produces and spreads knowledge par excellence, making it more intelligent, more efficient and more inclusive. Along this path there is also the need to rethink the curriculum and align it with corporate needs.

Sharifah, N. & et.al. (2014) have found in their research paper "21st Century core soft skills research focus for integrated online project based collaborative learning model" that the professional graduates of Malaysia are not getting the job as they lack the soft skills required by their employee at the time of their selection process. The objective of their study is to determine the core soft skills related to 21st Century which will be an Integrated Online Project Base collaborative learning model. Result shows that communication skills, problem solving and critical thinking skills are the core soft skills related to 21st Century.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

To identify the need of students towards the learning of soft skills in professional courses.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design: Survey research design has been adopted to conduct a research on 'A study on the perception of the students in various professional courses on the need of learning soft skills'

Area of Study: Moradabad Region.

Data Sources:

- i. Primary Data – Collected from the students of the Professional Courses through questionnaires.
- ii. Secondary Data- shall be collected from available literature through books, magazines, journals, reports, periodicals, newspapers, websites etc.

Data Collection Tool: A self made tool 'Perception scale for the need of soft skills in professional students' has been used to collect the data. The data is in the form of frequencies for five point scale so it is quantitative in nature and at nominal scale.

Sampling Technique: Stratified Random Sampling technique is used to collect data for the present study.

Statistical Techniques Employed: Since the data for analysis is primary in nature and sample size is varied for various sample units, therefore as per the response rate chi square test is applied. The significance level 0.05 has been selected for this test due to the nature of data and result.

Sample Constitution: The sample for the study constituted 312 professional students of private and government colleges of Moradabad Region.

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the following hypotheses have been tested through Chi - Square test.

Hypothesis: The following hypotheses have been tested.

Hypothesis 1: Perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills is significantly independent of course.

Table 1: Test of Independence for Hypothesis 1

χ^2	d.f.	Significance	Position
42.05	8	0.05	H ₀ Rejected

Table 1 shows that the calculated value of χ^2 42.05 is greater than the tabulated value of χ^2 15.507 for 8 d. f. at 5% level of significance. There is a significant difference among B. Ed, MBA and MCA student in reference to the perception of professional students on the need of learning soft skills. So the hypothesis is rejected. Among all the courses the students of MCA have been found with more need of learning soft skills in comparison to the students of B. Ed and the least need has been observed in case of the students of MBA course.

Hypothesis 2: Perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills is significantly independent of age.

Table 2: Test of Independence for Hypothesis 2

χ^2	d.f.	Significance	Position
12.86	4	0.05	H ₀ Rejected

Table 2 shows that the calculated value of χ^2 12.86 is greater than the tabulated value of χ^2 9.488 for 4 d. f. at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, there is a significant difference between the perception of the students in the age group (above 22) years and in the age group (19-22) years in reference to the perception of professional students on the need of learning soft skills. So the hypothesis is rejected. Thus, it can be concluded that the students (above 22) years found more need of learning soft skills in comparison to the students in the age group (19-22).

Hypothesis 3: Perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills is significantly independent of gender.

Table 3: Test of Independence for Hypothesis 3

χ^2	d.f.	Significance	Position
13.26	4	0.05	H ₀ Rejected

Table 3 shows that the calculated value of χ^2 13.26 is greater than the tabulated value of χ^2 9.488 for 4 d. f. at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, there is a significant difference among the perception of the boys and girls of B.Ed, MBA and MCA students in reference to the perception of professional students on the need of learning soft skills. So the hypothesis is rejected. Thus, it can be concluded that the need of learning soft skills has been found more in case of boys as compared to the girls.

Hypothesis 4: Perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills is significantly independent of area.

Table 4: Test of Independence for Hypothesis 4

χ^2	d.f.	Significance	Position
12.42	4	0.05	H ₀ Rejected

Table 4 shows that the calculated value of χ^2 12.42 is less than the tabulated value of χ^2 9.488 for 4 d. f. at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, there is a significant difference among the perception of urban and rural students of B.Ed, MBA and MCA in reference to the learning of soft skills. So the hypothesis is rejected. Thus, it can be concluded that both the groups felt the need of learning soft skills but in case of urban students it has been found more as compared to the students of rural area.

Hypothesis 5: Perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills is significantly independent of board.

Table 5: Test of Independence for Hypothesis 5

χ^2	d.f.	Significance	Position
17.69	8	0.05	H ₀ Rejected

Table 5 shows that the calculated value of χ^2 17.69 is greater than the tabulated value of χ^2 15.507 for 8 d. f. at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, there is a significant difference among the perception of the students of ICSE, CBSE and UP board in reference to the need of learning soft skills. So the hypothesis is rejected. The three categories of respondents from ICSE, CBSE and UP board have been taken out of which 13 have been from ICSE, 82 from CBSE and 217 from UP board. Thus, it can be concluded that the need of learning soft skills is more in case of the students of UP board as compared to CBSE board and the least need has been observed in case of the students of ICSE board.

Hypothesis 6: Perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills is significantly independent of stream.

Table 6: Test of Independence for Hypothesis 6

χ^2	d.f.	Significance	Position
26.44	8	0.05	H ₀ Rejected

Table 6 shows that the calculated value of χ^2 26.44 is greater than the tabulated value of χ^2 15.507 for 8 d. f. at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, there is a significant difference among the perception of the students of Arts, Commerce and Science streams in reference to the need of learning soft skills. So the hypothesis is rejected. Among all the streams we observed different perception about the need of learning it. Students of Arts have been found with more need of learning soft skills as compared to the students of Commerce and less need has been observed in case of the students of Science.

Sub-hypothesis 7: Perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills is significantly independent of medium.

Table 7: Test of Independence for Hypothesis 7

χ^2	d.f.	Significance	Position
19.33	8	0.05	H ₀ Rejected

Table 7 shows that the calculated value of χ^2 19.33 is greater than the tabulated value of χ^2 15.507 for 8 d. f. at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, there is a significant difference among B.Ed, MBA and MCA student in reference to the perception of professional students towards the learning of soft skills. So the hypothesis is rejected. Thus it can be concluded that the students of Hindi medium have been found with more need of learning soft skills as compared to the students of English medium.

OBJECTIVE-WISE CONCLUSION

Objective : "To identify and analyze perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills with respect to their background variables".

The findings of the above objective have been given below according to the background variables:

- 1.The need of learning soft skills has been found among all the courses. If we compare all the courses it has been found that the students of B.Ed found more need of learning soft skills as compared to the students of MCA and the least need has been observed in case of the students of MBA.
- 2.On the basis of age the need of learning soft skills has been found more in case of the students in age group (above 22) years than the students in the age group (19-22) years.
- 3.On the basis of gender the need of learning soft skills has been found to be equal in case of both male and female.
- 4.The need of learning soft skills is has been found more in case of the students of rural areas as compared to the students of urban areas.
- 5.The need of learning soft skills has been found more in the students of UP board than the students of CBSE board and the least need has been observed in the students of ICSE board.
- 6.The need of learning soft skills has been found more in the students of Science stream than the students of Arts stream and the least need has been observed in the students of Commerce stream.
- 7.The students of Hindi medium have been found with more need of learning soft skills as compared to the students of English medium.

Hypothesis Wise Conclusion

Table 8: The result of hypothesis regarding the perception of students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills

Hypothesis	Result
Perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills is significantly independent of course.	Rejected
Perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills is significantly independent of age.	Rejected
Perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills is significantly independent of gender.	Rejected
Perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills is significantly independent of area.	Rejected
Perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills is significantly independent of board.	Rejected
Perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills is significantly independent of stream.	Rejected
Perception of the students of professional courses towards the need of learning soft skills is significantly independent of medium.	Rejected

CONCLUSION

Table 8 shows that all the hypothesis have been rejected which shows that there is a significance difference among the perception of the students towards the need of learning soft skills in their professional course with respect to their background variable.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

From overall analysis it can be concluded that all the students of professional courses have been found with the need of learning soft skills for their professional growth. Thus, there should be a proper training to develop their soft skills in their respective courses. It will provide them a better opportunity for their placement in a reputed company. Teachers in professional courses should pay more attention on the students above the age of 22 years by providing them more and more opportunities to organize the college activities and programs in order to develop them in a desired direction. Thus, learning through real life like situation they can fulfill their need of learning soft skills.

The requirement of soft skills has been observed equally in both the gender. They won't be able to survive without inculcating excellent soft skills in their personality. It is also essential for their promotion and to sustain for a long time in an organization. After analyzing the need of the students belong to urban and rural areas it has been found that the students belong to rural areas have less exposure to outside world. Thus there is a great need to introduce quality workshops, short term courses and career counseling of the students in all professional courses. More and more competitions should be organized for the development of the students who are underprivileged.

Students of all the boards need the training of soft skills but the more need has been observed in case of the students belonging to U. P. board in comparison to the students belonging to CBSE and ICSE boards. Students of U.P boards have Hindi medium and they lack spoken English and good writing skills. In professional courses they should be given more and more practice to improve their comprehension skills which are the basic needs of any profession or to get a selection in a reputed workplace. The students weak with good communication skills come across with a lot of problem to face an interview at the time of their placement. The students belonging to Science stream have been

recognized with more need to learn soft skills in comparison to the students of Arts and Commerce streams. Thus the teachers should pay more attention to develop the students weak with soft skills so that they may be satisfied with the curriculum activities provided in their professional courses to improve their soft skills.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Research in any branch of human knowledge is never a closed chapter. There is always a need of finding solution to new problems and testing to reality of the solution to the previous problems. In the light of the results, subsequent conclusions and experience gained in the course of this study, following suggestions may be made for further research in this area:

- This study has been conducted in Moradabad region in Uttar Pradesh, it can also be conducted in other regions of different states.
- This study can be done on the lack of soft skills and its consequences on the personal and professional life of the students.
- This study can be done on the development of soft skills through technology.
- Researcher has conducted the study on profession courses. Further study can be done to know the soft skills of people in different vocations.
- Researcher has conducted the study on the need, of professional students for soft skills. Further study can be done on the lack of soft skills and its consequences on the personal and professional life of the people.
- Researcher has conducted the study on the positive outcome of soft skills. Further study can be done to know the negative impact of the lack of soft skills on workforce.

Thus any further research in extension of current research findings will surely be a valuable addition to the existing domain of knowledge on changing trends and scenario of the professional education. Therefore, the current research can open many new aspects of dynamic thinking, intellectual pursuit and collective action, not only for the betterment of professional students but also for the industry and society in general.

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