

# Soft Skills—An Assessment Technique for Better-Quality Learning

R. Sucharan Reddy

Department of English NIMS University, Jaipur  
E-mail: reddysucharan111@gmail.com

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**Abstract**—*In many educational institutions in India whether at primary, secondary or tertiary level, the curriculum related to soft skills has been over looked due to its non importance. Many a time it has been noticed that educational institutions have failed to understand its importance. Always importance was given to core subjects along with languages, but never was soft skills considered part of educational curriculum. Next, due to poor implementation and improper assessment of soft skills, many learners passing out of educational institutions are failing to cope with the pressures of society and life. Hence, best practices along with good and proper assessment techniques are need of the hour.*

## Introduction

Soft skills are important in life and career. Soft skills do help an individual to communicate and understand others well. In today's environment soft skills, in fact, have become crucial for prospering. Soft skills like attitude, discipline and communication skills are considered very vital in every sphere of life.

Moreover today's learning environment is 20% theory and 80% practical. That means domain skills weightage is only 20% whereas non domain skills like soft skills and communication skills weigh 80%. In addition it is clearly understood that without properly assessing ones strengths and weaknesses, it is difficult to move ahead in today's times. It is also vital that soft skills need to be practiced and assessed at every stage of life and career starting from primary education.

The problem is, the importance of these soft skills is often undervalued, and there is far less training provided for them than hard skills. For some reason, organizations seem to expect people know how to behave on the job. They tend to assume that everyone knows and understands the importance of being on time, taking initiative, being friendly, and producing high quality work.

Further for not taking initiative in implementing soft skills as part of teaching and learning process by the institutions is due to lack of vision. In today's job scenario, assessment of soft skills has become crucial, and even are a part and parcel of selection process. As industry is focusing too much on soft skills at the entry level, many learners are failing in the interviews due to lack of understanding its importance and its

essence in life and career. The following are some of the reasons for failing to implement soft skills properly.

### 1. Poor vision and mission

Either the policy makers at the macro level or institutions at the micro level have definitely failed when the need for implementing soft skills was really required. Due to poor vision and mission at macro and micro level, individuals have suffered in life and career in failing to assess their soft skills. Many a time institutions believed that individuals do possessed soft skills already, and further also were of the opinion that it was not required to assess their soft skills at all.

### 2. Too much focus on knowledge

Another major reason to fail to implement and assess soft skills at different levels of education is because of too much emphasis on hard skills and knowledge. In the process the emphasis was on rote learning and testing of knowledge, rather than on soft skills. Hence, institutions always believed that knowledge was sufficient to achieve goals of life and career at every level starting from primary to tertiary level.

### 3. No proper Appraisal and evaluation methods

Even if soft skills are taught by the institutions, it has been found that there are no proper appraisal and evaluation methods or techniques to assess the individual's soft skills. Due to this, individuals could not either gauge or knew their strengths and weakness at all.

### 4. Lack of encouragement and motivation

Even if some of the institutions laid emphasis on soft skills, due to poor assessment and evaluation techniques led to demotivation in the individuals, in the process individuals never got an opportunity to know their strengths and weaknesses. Even individuals learning soft

skills are not able to assess and evaluate their own soft skills due to lack of encouragement and motivation.

#### 5. Poor focus on Innovative teaching methods

If institutions have been more proactive in their policies pertaining to education with a vision, definitely soft skills could have been introduced as one of the innovative teaching methods. It could have even been part of regular curriculum.

#### 6. Too much emphasis on Traditional Methods

Soft skills were a backbencher due to too much emphasis on imparting knowledge and traditional methods. Due to emphasis on traditional methods, individuals have been deprived of learning soft skills, which has made them to struggle in understanding soft skills and its importance in life and career.

#### 7. Poor Real Time Learning

Institutional have badly failed to gauge the actual requirement of today's world. Because of poor vision and mission of the institutes individuals were always at the receiving end. Individuals in the process suffered due to lack of real time soft skills knowledge.

#### 8. Lack of Training Programmes/Refresher Courses

Policy makers at the macro and institution at the micro level did not focus or think about training their teachers in soft skills. They laid training their respective teachers in teaching methodologies rather than soft skills. Because of teachers poor awareness on soft skills implementation of it became difficult at every level. Whenever refresher courses were conducted the stress was on training the teachers by updating their knowledge rather than on soft skills.

#### 9. Poor budget allocation

Majority of the budget is generally allocated for either salary, training or else day to day expenses of the institutions. No institution has taken initiative to allocate separate budget for implementing soft skills along with good trainers, materials and training facilities.

#### 10. Gap between Collaboration of academic and industry missing

Another major drawback is failing to reduce the gap of academia and industry. Majority of the institutions have never thought of going for a meaningful and fruitful collaboration with the industry. Their focus was always one sided. Due to lack of collaboration with the industry

institutions could neither understand nor were able to gauge the importance and essence of soft skills.

#### **How to Assess Soft Skills**

Since non domain skills occupy 80% in today's learning pedagogy, it is essential and vital to implement activity based learning, as part of the teaching and learning process. Soft skills can be assessed better only with activities, but not theoretically. As Howard Gardner rightly says that in a classroom the learning styles of learners vary. While designing the activities for improving and assessing learners' soft skills, teachers should take extra care in designing the activities based on learners' interest. The said designed activities must be able to motivate learners to participate wholeheartedly. If the designed activities do not motivate learners, then assessment may differ or may not be accurate. That is why it is vital to take into consideration the interest of the learners' while designing activities. In addition teachers may also design individual modules pertaining to soft skills. Only when learners' participate enthusiastically and wholeheartedly, assessing soft skills will become easy.

#### **When to Assess Soft Skills**

The need of the hour is to implement the best assessment techniques and methods for properly assessing soft skills of learners at every level of education i.e. primary, secondary, higher and tertiary level. When learners involve in activities wholeheartedly, they will understand soft skills better. After learners complete performing the designed activities, learners can be given a questionnaire with a set of questions to be answered, so, as to make them assess their soft skills. Learners must be taught to comprehensively and in detail assess their soft skills. As they assess they must gradually improve their soft skills. Assessing soft skills must be made regular as part of teaching and learning process at every level.

#### **Few Thoughtful Activities to improve Soft Skills**

The following activities mentioned below with good practices, if implemented with proper assessment techniques may help a learner to upgrade their soft skills gradually.

1. Making Community oriented projects part of the curriculum

Every learner will like to know more about the society in which they are living. In fact community oriented projects like collecting data of poverty, literacy programmes, population census, distribution of Govt. welfare schemes, about slums, orphanages, old homes, remote villages, etc. will really test learners soft skills. Even extension programmes like educating and enlightening rural folks on communicable diseases, save water, maintaining hygiene, about welfare programmes, etc is a good idea, if implemented. Moreover community oriented projects and extension programmes will give learners an opportunity to understand and master soft skills well. Even the assessing will also be fruitful.

## 2. Through Arts and Science Projects

Regular exhibiting of arts and science projects gives a scope for learners to enhance their soft skills. But the fact is not all learners may truly involve in participating either in arts or science projects. Hence, determined motivation is needed from the teachers to see that their learners come forward to exhibit their respective projects. Even through these projects many important areas of soft skills can be assessed.

## 3. Through Team Work

As today's work culture is moreover team work, many different activities can be designed on to improve the team spirit in learners. Activities like busters, group activities, even games and sports, etc. will be appreciated by learners through their sincere participation. Team work gives a better scope for assessment.

## 4. Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning is also a good method by which learners' soft skills can be improved and assessed.

## 5. Project based learning

Project based learning is one of the important methods of teaching and learning. Especially learners of primary and secondary level can be given as many projects individually or in groups. Soft skills like time management, discipline, attitude, etc. can be assessed through these projects.

## 6. Incorporating Extracurricular activities as part of the curriculum

Not only task based, cooperative learning method, team work, etc. but even extracurricular activities like dramas, debates, elocution, JAM session, role plays, solving puzzles and Sudoku, word building activities, etc. also can be used as a technique to assess learners soft skills.

## 7. Games and Sports

Teachers must motivate all learners to actively participate and engage themselves at least 1 hour daily in games and sports. Soft skills like time management, patience, endurance, attitude, etc. can be assessed through games and sports.

## 8. Industrial Visits

Industrial visits or tours give teachers not only to assess learners hard skills but also soft skills.

## 9. Task based learning

Just like project based learning, task based learning too is a good soft skills assessment technique. Many tasks such as role play, monologues, soliloquies, etc. can be used as a evaluate tool to assess soft skills.

## Conclusion

It is not that knowledge should be neglected nor overlooked, but along with imparting good knowledge in learners even imparting soft skills is also important. Further as the need of the hour is on soft skills, it is the right time that policy makers at the macro level and institutions at the micro level realize and take initiative to sincerely lay focus on soft skills by incorporating it in every level of education starting from primary level to tertiary level.

By just introducing soft skills will not make much difference in the teaching and learning process, but if introduced with good assessing and evaluating techniques then the true purpose of learning soft skills will be met. Only when proper emphasis is laid on soft skills by the policy makers, learners assessing their individual soft skills will always be a challenge.

Finally, as soft skills play an important and vital role in life and career. It is vital to improve one's soft skills regularly through assessment techniques. Through proper assessing techniques one not only overcomes the pitfalls of soft skills but also can appraise oneself properly.

## References

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