RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS FOR ENHANCING SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYABLE SKILLS AMONG THE STUDENTS

*Babasaheb Kangune

Department of English, Chhatrapati Shivaji College, Satara (Autonomous) Maharashtra (India)

ABSTRACT

21st century is essentially an era of information, communication and technology. New economic policy opened up thousands of career opportunities to the aspiring youth. Because of globalization and privatization, there is no place for any kind of compromise as far as qualitative metrics are concerned. Students have to prove their potentialities in order to create their own position in the career market. Students of humanities especially, languages and social sciences have good career opportunities in the fields like marketing, BPO/ KPO industry, banking, finance, insurance, management, HR sections of MNCs, business administration, counseling, media, entertainment and journalism, editing and translation, event management, compering, hoteling and tourism, public relations departments etc. No doubt our students work hard and achieve good marks in the examination. They obtain good score in the final year examination. Students are having necessary hard skills in computer, Tally, MS Word, Excel, animation, PowerPoint etc. Our students lack focused approach which is a key factor in becoming successful in the life. Workshops on 'Soft Skills' at UG level provide the best platform for students to realize their potentialities and make career planning accordingly. The present research focuses on enhancing employable skills among the UG students of languages and social sciences through soft skills.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutes create eligible bachelors for different positions in government and private sector. However, the changing scenario at national and international level, new economic policy, globalization, privatization and ICT-enabled workplaces have added different expectations in job market in 21st century. The students of humanities especially languages and social sciences are studied for the present research. The students of languages and social sciences have good career opportunities in marketing, BPO/ KPO industry, banking, finance, insurance, management, HR sections of MNCs, business administration, counseling, media, entertainment and journalism, editing and translation, event management, compering, hoteling and tourism, public relations departments etc. The students of humanities have more scope for the expansion of personality traits to face new global challenges. They possess so many inherent qualities. However, only classroom teaching is not sufficient to let these students realize their potentialities and qualities.

Most of the students from rural background possess qualities like hard work and sincerity. They want to create their own identity. Unfortunately, the existing student-teacher ratio in our higher education institutes is so high that our teaching faculty members find it difficult to attend to the individual potentiality and need of each student. Therefore, workshops on 'Soft Skills' will be the basic platform for making students focused, target-oriented, confident and employable in new job market.

Objectives: The objectives of the present research can be stated as below:

- To conduct the online survey of soft skills acquired and developed by the UG students of languages and social sciences.
- To make analysis of soft skills requirement of the UG students of languages and social sciences.
- To focus on the importance of' Soft Skills Development Workshop' for UG students.
- To analyze the students' responses to the 'Online Soft Skills Development Workshop'.

- To make a comprehensive statement on importance of 'Soft Skills Development Workshop' in enhancing sustainable employable skills among the students.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

In order to achieve the above stated objectives, the following material and methods are employed:

- The online survey of soft skills acquired and developed by the UG students of languages and social sciences was conducted.
- A group of students was finalized for online soft skills development workshop.
- According to the need of the students, a 'Ten Days Online Soft Skills Development Workshop' was conducted. In this workshop, focus was given on developing basic soft skills among the UG students of languages and social sciences. Experts in different subject areas were invited to conduct online interactive sessions for the students.

Soft Skills: Soft skills are referred to as life skills or people's skills which play pivotal role in the job market in 21st century. It is not a single skill. It comprises so many skills which one has to acquire and develop. Soft skills development (SSD) has become one of the parameters of successful personal and professional life for last few decades. Soft skills development (SSD) at individual and professional level play significant role in managing human relations and developing interpersonal skills. In order to have healthy human relations in personal and professional life, soft skills are very important. Soft skills strengthen human relations at different levels. Soft skills enrich one's understanding of the world, attitude towards various happenings around us and finally transform an individual into a good human being. Soft skill development can be defined as a process of development of the human psyche and personality so that a person becomes more social and acceptable to the society at large, including the corporate world(Ghosh, 2012). Soft skills vary from person to person as it depends on his/ her inborn qualities also. For example, in effective oral communication, one can achieve language proficiency, appropriate body language etc. But voice quality, pitch modulation, coordination of speech organs etc. will depend upon individual's inborn qualities. Apart from individual variations, collectively, one can develop and enrich soft skills at individual level to manage human relations at different levels.

"Soft Skills" correlates with some terms of a very close meaning: "Life Skills", "Emotional Intelligence Quotients", "Social Skills", and "Interpersonal Skills". Soft skills is a term often associated with a person's Emotional Intelligence Quotient, the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness, managing people, leadership, etc. that characterize relationships with other people. Soft skills, also known as people skills, complement hard skills to enhance an individual's relationships, job performance and career prospects. It is often said that hard skills will get you an interview but you need soft skills to get – and keep – the job. Soft skills development (SSD) is an umbrella term which comprises so many topics related to our day-to-day life. For example, in the book, *Managing Soft Skills for Personality Development*, following topics are included under the soft skills development programme.

Soft Skills/ Life Skills: Definitions: i) In the 'Preamble' of the Curriculum for Soft Skills/ Life Skills (*Jeevan Kaushal*) designed by the UGC, Soft Skills/ Life Skills are defined as 'the behaviors used appropriately and responsibly in the management of personal and professional affairs. They are also set of human skills acquired via learning or direct experience that are used to handle problems and questions commonly encountered in day to-day personal and professional life'.

- World Health Organization (WHO) defined Soft Skills/ Life Skills as "abilities for adaptive and positive behavior that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life".
- The term 'Soft Skills' is defined in the Collins English Dictionary as "desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude".

Need of Soft Skills Development: University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi, published the Curriculum for Soft Skills/ Life Skills (*Jeevan Kaushal*) in August, 2019. In the 'Preamble' of the Curriculum for Soft Skills/ Life Skills (*Jeevan Kaushal*) designed by the UGC, the following observations are made which clearly focus on the need of soft skills/ life skills in the development of employability among the students:

"As per the Quality Mandate of University Grant Commission (UGC), UGC needs to take initiatives for providing Life Skills (including soft skills) to students enrolled in Institutions of Higher Education especially at under-graduate level. Life skills, though less tangible traits, play an important role in increasing the employability as well as self esteem of the students. These may include communication skills, interpersonal skills, time management, team work, flexibility, problem solving, professional skills, decision making skills, leadership abilities and universal values among others……Life skills, thus, are the means to empower young minds in demanding situations in personal, professional and social life. Adoption of life skills is the key to excellence……Life skills programme aims at inculcating in the students both personal and professional skills in the areas of understanding of self and others, interpersonal skills, high performance teams, leadership potential, communication & presentation skills, techniques of problem solving, decision making, fostering creativity and innovation for personal and professional excellence, stress management, time management and conflict management and inculcation of human values. The course requires active participation of the students and the faculty as Facilitator, Mentor and Trainer". ('Preamble'- Curriculum for Soft Skills/ Life Skills (*Jeevan Kaushal*)- UGC, August, 2019).

According to the research conducted in Harvard and Stanford Universities only 15% of your career success depends on your hard skills, whilst remaining 85% on your soft skills. "Soft skills get little respect but will make or break your career" (Peggy Klaus).

Online Survey of Soft Skills Acquired and Developed by the UG Students: The next important part of the present research was to conduct the survey of soft skills acquired and developed by the UG students of languages and social sciences

under Humanities. Because of the pandemic COVID-19, online survey of soft skills acquired and developed by the UG students of languages and social sciences was conducted. Online survey of 115 students of UG was conducted by using Google Form. 22 responses of B.A. Part-I students, 11 responses of B.A. Part-II students and 82 responses of B.A. Part-III students were collected. B.A. Part-III students having different special subjects like Marathi, Hindi, English, Sanskrit, Economics, Geography, Political Science, History, Sociology and Psychology recorded their responses. Total 17 questions were set to collect students' responses regarding their understanding of soft skills.

Online Soft Skills Development Workshop: The next part of the present research was to provide soft skills training to the select students. A ten days online workshop on "Soft Skills Development for Employability Enhancement of Under-graduate Students" was conducted. The aim of the workshop on "Soft Skills Development for Employability Enhancement of Under-graduate Students" was to provide online practical and interactive training to the UG students of the college focusing on developing soft skills. This workshop was an attempt to enhance employability of under-graduate students of the college by providing soft skills training to the select group of students. The workshop provided 40 hours (Theory+ Practical) training to the select UG students of the college. Because of the pandemic COVID-19, this workshop was conducted online in November, 2020. The Google Meet platform was used to conduct a Ten Days Online Workshop on "Soft Skills Development for Employability Enhancement of Under-graduate Students". The workshop was conducted as per the schedule given below. Taking into account the soft skills requirements of the under-graduate students, the topics were finalized, and experts in the respective subject areas were invited to conduct online interactive sessions and practical. This online training was given to 61 under-graduate students. The online feedback of each session was collected from the participants. Besides, an overall feedback based on the entire workshop was collected from the participants.

RESULTS

The following observations are based on ten days online workshop on "Soft Skills Development for Employability Enhancement of Under-graduate Students".

Soft Skills Development Workshops: Supplementary and Complementary to Classroom Teaching:

Soft skills development workshops are supplementary and complementary to classroom teachings. In the crowded classes, it is not possible to attend to the individual student and give him training. Soft skills workshops are target-oriented. It works for the select group of students. Therefore, it is the best platform for enhancing employable skills among the students. Through interactive sessions and practical, students open up their thoughts and expectations. Such workshops make students target-oriented and develop the overall personality of the students.

A Hub of New Experiences and Creative thinking: Soft skills development workshop is the hub of new experiences and creative thinking for the promising under-graduate students. The organizers of such workshops can invite experts

in business communication, human resources, personality development, interpersonal communication, languages and human behavior etc. to train the students. The brainstorming sessions by the experts can change the life of an individual student. Perhaps, such a workshop will be the turning point in one's career path. The success stories narrated by the experts provide a new approach and vision towards life. The stories of Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Sudha Murthy, M.K. Gandhi, Major D.P. Singh and many other often give new insight to our students. Soft skills development workshop is a platform that provides students an opportunity to think out of the box. The discussions in the interactive sessions develop critical and creative thinking and problem-solving skills among the students.

Initiation of Self-discovery through SWOT/ SWOC: Interactive sessions on SWOT/ SWOC analysis provide the best platform for self-discovery to the students. The soft skills development workshop acquaints students with SWOT/ SWOC. This stage is very important in making career planning. The analysis of 'Strengths', 'Weaknesses', 'Opportunities' and 'Threats/ Challenges' at individual level is the best way to set different goals in life. SWOT/ SWOC analysis makes students realize their own strengths and weaknesses. It makes them familiar with external factors which are likely to affect their respective goals i.e. threats/ challenges. Students really enjoy the SWOT/ SWOC analysis sessions. They have to list their 'Strengths' and 'Weaknesses', different 'Opportunities' available as well as probable 'Threats' on their way. The SWOT/ SWOT analysis enriches students' understanding of the 'Self' and external factors like 'Threats/ Challenges'.

Syllabus Vs. Life Skills: The basic difference between classroom teaching and soft skills development workshop is that classroom teaching is 'Syllabus' oriented and soft skills development workshop is 'Skill' oriented. In classroom teaching, the subject-wise syllabuses of different courses are taught. The main focus of the concerned subject-teacher is to complete the syllabus in time, make students ready for class tests, oral and written examinations. The classroom teaching at UG level makes necessary preparation of the students for respective degrees. The ultimate goal is a 'degree' with good marks/ grade. In soft skills development workshops, focus is given on enhancing different 'Life Skills' among the students. Such workshops enrich students' overall personality and prepare them to create their own identity in real life. Soft skills workshops develop positive attitude, sincerity, politeness, self-confidence, interpersonal skills and many other qualities among the students. The motivated student with a vision can achieve success in any field. The lifelong skills imparted through soft skills development workshop can change any average student into a successful human being.

Initiates 'Out of Box Thinking Process': In the age of information, communication and technology, one gets all kinds of information at a single click. The social media platforms have heavily affected the 'Thinking Process' on the part of individuals. Soft skills development workshop is a platform that initiates 'Out of Box Thinking Process' on the part of students. The brainstorming sessions and other practical make the students realize their capabilities and potentialities. They set their goals and make proper plan to pursue their respective goals.

Table 1. Topics under Soft Skills Development (SSD)

Communication	Self-discovery	Duty consciousness
Internalization of criticism	Eagerness to learn	Conflict resolution
Etiquette and manners	Accountability	Fairness in dealings
Adorable behavior traits	Fellow-feeling	Alertness
General knowledge and understanding	Amiability	Goal-setting
Assertiveness	Good attitude	Awareness
Good conversational skills	Body language	Good humour
Catholicity of character	Good level of intelligence	Commitment
Grasping ability	Common sense	Group discussion
Compassion	Honesty and integrity	Courtesy
Humility	Creativity	Idealism
Critical thinking	Impartiality in dealing	Decision making
Innovative spirit	Interpersonal relations	Psychological stability
Interview techniques	Public speaking	Justice
Punctuality	Being considerate and reasonable	Leadership quality
Reliability	Reasonable and realistic beliefs	Morality
Respect for others	Motivation	Simplicity
Objectivity	Sincerity	Organizational skills
Smartness	Perception levels	Sociability
Personality development	Straightforwardness	Stress management
Positive attitude and thinking	Positive reaction to outward stimulus	Team work
Presence of mind	Time management	Presentable personality
Trustworthiness	Presentation	Truthfulness

Table 2. Ten Days Online Soft Skills Development Workshop (Schedule)

Day/s	Session/s	Time	Topic/s
Day-I	I	9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	Soft Skills Vs Hard Skills
	II	3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Interview Techniques and Preparing C.V. / Resume
Day-II	I	9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	Importance of English Language in Making Career in 21st Century
	II	3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Campus to Corporate Training: BPO/ KPO Industry
Day-III	I	9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	Positive Attitude and Confidence Building
	II	3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Developing Leadership Qualities
Day-IV	I	9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	Interpersonal Skills
	II	3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Personality Development
Day-V	I	9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	Goal Setting
	II	3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Developing Communication Skills
Day-VI	I	9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	Entrepreneurial Skills
	II	3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Business Etiquette
Day-VII	I	9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	Music Therapy in Managing Stress
	II	3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Group Discussion
Day-VIII	I	9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	SWOT/ SWOC Analysis
	II	3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Time Management
Day-IX	I	9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	Preparation for Competitive Examinations
	II	3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Event Management and Compering a Programme
Day-X	I	9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	Skills for Mass Media and Mass Communication
	II	3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.	Developing Research Attitude and Ethics

Students become target-oriented. Instead of pursuing the conventional career paths, students get motivated and it initiates 'Out of Box Thinking Process' on the part of the learners. The students find so many career opportunities in different sectors matching to their respective potentialities. The motivated students find the innovative career opportunities through their observations.

Enriches Positive Attitude, Self-confidence and Assertiveness: Workshops on soft skills enrich qualities like positive attitude, self-confidence and assertiveness among the students. One's attitude may be 'positive' or 'negative' affects his/ her success. A man with 'negative' attitude finds only difficulties and challenges in each situation. On the contrary, a man having 'positive' attitude can find opportunities in difficult and challenging situation also. Soft skills workshop provides a platform for the development of positive attitude among the students. Other important qualities which play pivotal role in one's personal and professional life are 'Self-confidence' and 'Assertiveness'. Soft skills development workshops build up self-confidence and assertiveness among the students. Here students realize their own strengths.

They start believing in themselves. They do not have any false assumptions. A self-motivated student concentrates on his goals and it leads to his success. He develops the qualities like assertiveness, persuasion, courtesy, politeness etc. which strengthens his relations with human resources as well as other organizations.

Creates New Visionaries, Leaders and Initiators: The 'Missile Man of India', Dr. A.P. J. Abdul Kalam has expected an India governed by noble leaders. Workshops on 'Soft Skills' promote the students to utilize their potentialities at the great extent. The participant students get new vision and approach to look around the world. Such workshops enable the foundation of future generation leaders needed in different sectors. Soft skills workshops develop leadership qualities among the participants. The students set their goals and start working. The participant students realize their responsibility in the building of the nation. The different success stories shared by the experts encourage the students to undertake challenging enterprises. It motivates the students to realize and utilize their own potentialities and skills and work accordingly.

DISCUSSION

The following discussion is based on the present research:

Regular Organization of Soft Skills Workshops for UG Students: Higher education institute must organize Soft Skills Workshops regularly for under-graduate students. The language teachers must take initiative in organizing such workshops. Experts in interpersonal communication, business communication, psychology etc. can be invited to have interactive sessions.

Batches of Limited Students: Soft Skills Workshops are different from regular classroom teaching. The trainers conduct so many activities while conducting their sessions. Therefore, less than 25 students must be enrolled for each batch.

Activity-based Interactive Sessions: Maximum skills are imparted through Soft Skills Development Workshops. In order to enrich all the necessary soft skills among the students, focus must be given on activity-based interactive sessions. There are limitations in online soft skills development workshops. But, one can conduct so many activities in offline/ in the campus training programmes.

Regular Batches of Ten Days for Second and Third Year Students of UG: In order to enhance employable skills among the students of languages and social sciences, different batches of ten days soft skills development must be organized for second and third year students of undergraduate. At least 40 hours training must be given twice to the students of under-graduate.

MoUs, Collaborations with Business Houses/ Industries/ Other HEIs: Soft skills workshop is the platform for undergraduate students of languages and social sciences to have realization of qualities/ skills required in business/ corporate/ industry. Therefore, Higher Education Institutes can sign MoUs and Collaborations with business houses/ industries/ other HEIs in order to avail experts working in these fields. MoUs, Collaborations with Business Houses/ Industries can help to conduct internships/ projects related to soft skills. Mock-interviews, internships, project-work can give corporate/ professional experience to the students.

CONCLUSION

Soft skills workshops may be offline or online, make the learners not only active but also proactive and target-oriented. It is supplementary and complementary to classroom teaching. It helps to boost the confidence of our graduates to face global challenges and develops necessary employable skills. Good communication skill, interview techniques, positive attitude, confidence, assertiveness, presentation skill, business etiquette, interpersonal skills play pivotal role in enhancing employability of the students.

The students of languages and social sciences can make career in public, finance, administration, human resource departments, public relations, marketing, media and entertainment, advertising, journalism, BPO/KPO, office management etc. Besides, they can undertake their own enterprises. The soft skills workshops enrich students with necessary life skills which can give new dimension to their personality and initiates employability. Soft skills development is an umbrella term. It consists of so many skills. Therefore, soft skills workshops attempt to develop maximum life skills among the students. It awakens the students, makes them realize their inborn qualities and promotes them to undertake challenging tasks in the life. Such workshops play an important role in wiping out passivity, negativity, phobia, depression etc. from the lives of under-graduate students. It strengthens the willpower and self-confidence of the students. It develops decision making abilities, team spirit and positive attitude among the students. Soft skills development workshops will increase the placement of the students of humanities especially languages and social sciences. In order to boost the morale of the students and make them self-confident, the soft skills development workshops will play crucial role. In situations like pandemics, online soft skills development workshops can keep students focused and target oriented. The students will select proper career options and work honestly and sincerely to achieve their career goals. The process of rethinking in terms of creativity, innovation, novelty, invention will be initiated and that will give birth to the smart leaders of 21st century. Soft skills development workshops will become the centre for the development of creative mind; and the creative mind will never face the problem of 'unemployment'. Therefore, soft skills development workshop is the platform for enhancing sustainable employable skills among the under-graduate students.

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