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# An Integrated Study Of The Philosophy Of Soft Skills And Emotional Intelligence

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## ABSTRACT

The evolving nature of modern, scientific and technological advancements, the subsequent convergence of world markets and the modern organisational structures, have changed the way one looks at skills, attitude and work-culture, be it at the job market or the work-space. Consequently, one gets to see a very competitive market, wherein business organisations across the globe are realising that they either have to develop and adopt new approaches and skills to survive in the extremely competitive business world, or perish. Taking note of such a change, Alexander, C.P. (2012) stated that „today, the corporate swears by Targets, Speed, and Productivity" (Alexander, C.P. 2012., 13); thereby signalling that it is no longer enough to be an expert in the field of domain knowledge and hard technical skills.

Thus, considering that young minds are seen to be one of the most important human resources, it calls for attention to the development of skills and positive attitudinal traits in them, so as to help them succeed in classroom, profession, social and personal life. In this context, to paraphrase Toffler, Alvin (1970), one is expected to learn to adapt to the new world changes and accordingly arm themselves with the necessary soft skills; the 21st century life skills.

### **Need and Significance of the Study:**

Although soft skills is considered important in all walks of life, soft skills, as is read and understood, is generally confined to the management and corporate perspective and world, thereby limiting the scope of soft skills. Furthermore, although several research on the importance and promotion of soft skills have been carried out, the problem is that, being inspired by the spirit of targets, efficiency and output, the end result of soft skills as a study has, to a great extent, been laid out as skills devoid of spontaneity, deeper emotions and its intrinsic implications, as opposed to the values that can be drawn out from other disciplines.

Similarly, while many studies have been carried out on the skills needed in education, most studies have not focused enough on, nor given comprehensive views on soft skills

that need to be adopted by people in the teaching profession as well as in education. Likewise, the works do not explain as to why and how soft skills can be nurtured in students, teachers and those in education.

One of the notable gaps one comes across the works on soft skills is that hardly any study has speculated, or attempted to understand why a skill is called soft. Likewise, no attempts have been made to understand the base from which soft skills can be nurtured. This gap in literature, if answered, could lead to new understanding of a term so widely used, but rarely, clearly answered.

It is against such backdrop that this work has sought to find the meaning of soft skills, particularly building it up on a basic foundation by drawing instances from a humanities perspective -- particularly drawing from the philosophies of the past and modern times -- while at the same time, referring to the Emotional Intelligence of Daniel Goleman. Similarly this study has drawn from Business Management Studies, Politics and so on to substantiate points arrived at.

In this regard, it is an interdisciplinary approach towards understanding and explaining soft skills, as it is, to also suggest possible alternate ways in which soft skills can be learned. Therefore, the phrase „an interdisciplinary perspective“ has been used in the title of the report.

This study has been carried out keeping in mind the challenges and primary objectives of education<sup>1</sup>, while at the same time understanding the contemporary life skills demands. Likewise, it emphasises on the necessity of inculcating soft skills for those in education – management, educators and students. Furthermore, keeping in mind the relevance of the life skills needed in the contemporary times, this study suggests alternate ways of learning soft skills, at an earlier stage of one's academic life too, thereby highlighting the objective of soft skill which is seen as an important ingredient for success in life.

The results of this study will be of interest to those who are in education such as teachers, administrators, curriculum developers and students. Last, but not the least, limited research of this kind makes this study a significant one and the need of the hour.

### **Literature Review:**

The literature review attempts to present a systematic study focused on works across the globe, emphasising the need of soft skills touching the domains of education. One of the main reasons for reviewing the selected works was so as to highlight the urgent, if not strong call to educational institutions across disciplines, to give space to soft skills in academic curriculum; and that it is now considered the responsibility of those in education system to wake up to the call of educating and nurturing students with the necessary contemporary skills.

## **Objectives of the Study:**

The main objectives of this study are

1. To find out what makes the skills soft skills
2. To develop an integrated study of the philosophy of soft skills and emotional intelligence
3. To work towards a definition of soft skills
4. To identify the possible alternate ways of teaching and learning softskills

## **Limitations of the Study:**

1. The study intended to list out the various definitions and categorisations given on soft skills, so as to have a strong point on which to start. However, due to inability to get more relevant materials, the study had to contend with whatever material and resource was available at the time.
2. The study could have taken into account soft skills awareness in educational institutions, to see how far it has affected the selection criteria during recruitment. Similarly, it could have taken into account student awareness of soft skills. This would have given a clear understanding of how this awareness has impacted education, particularly in Nagaland. Nonetheless, this would have made the study too comprehensive to be completed within the time frame of the study.
3. It would have been interesting if the study also looked into soft skills from the local Naga<sup>2</sup> context. However, as with the above limitation, this would have made the study too vast to be completed within the given time frame. Nonetheless, there is a lot of scope for such studies.
4. There is a lot of connection one can make between English literature and soft skills. Although that was an earlier intention, this too would have stretched the study.
5. Last but not the least, a more in-depth and detailed study on soft skills can be carried out, drawing from philosophy and psychology.

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<sup>2</sup> Nagas are the indigenous tribal inhabitants of Nagaland, a state located in north-east India.

## **Research Methodology:**

The methodology for the study is qualitative and the work is explanatory in nature. The study has taken available secondary data in this field of study. The method of collecting secondary information was done through references from journals of various disciplines, conference papers, reviews, books, electronic media, newspapers, and from web sources. Much of the work provides a fresh look at soft skills study while developing on the materials available at the requirement and relevance of the time.

Since this study is descriptive in nature, it did not require any quantitative data or analysis for which reason, no field study was conducted. Nonetheless, personal observations, informal interactions, and experiences were also considered and made use of for confirmation of ideas and assumptions.

Based on the above, the study arrived at an understanding and identification of the required qualities that make up soft skills. With this, the work progressed onto explaining how soft skills can be nurtured in individuals and then onto educations, explaining why each skill picked should be a constituent of, and in education.

### **Summary:**

The thesis titled, *Soft Skills as a Contemporary Need in Education: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* is an attempt at understanding soft skills from a different perspective. Similarly, this study attempts to find a base for soft skills and thereby arrive at a definition of soft skills which is complimentary to the skills referred to in soft skills. It also seeks to examine the role of soft skills in education and what possible alternative approaches one can take to learn and nurture soft skills in the process of one's academic journey. So, using the above parameters the following chapters broadly classified into five chapters were written.

Thus, the second chapter titled *Soft Skills: Skills, Definitions and Classifications*, first of all clarifies the difference between soft skills and hard skills. Thereafter, it identifies the various definitions and classifications given on soft skills. This exercise reveals the confusion in understanding soft skills. It also reveals the inconsistency of soft skills definitions, as soft skills means different things to different people. However, drawing on a common understanding, a working definition, soft skills is one's ability to use the dispositional attributes within the framework of context, was arrived at.

Moving further, the third chapter titled, *An Integrated Study of the Philosophy of Soft Skills and Emotional Intelligence* seeks to refer to and draw from the dictionary meaning of the word „soft“. Thereafter, the study moves on to connect the meaning with following possible propositions and then onto possible bedrock of soft skills:

1. That the word software -- the converse of hardware -- must have allowed for ideation, that soft was taken to refer to the intangible human traits as opposed to hard, tangible, domain knowledge or skill.
2. That the word soft power, a term, used in political decisions, could have triggered the possibility of connecting the intangible attractive qualities in a person that draws people, with the influence and compelling power that powerful and rich nations have over the weaker or poorer nations.
3. That the corporate world emphasis on skills to deal with people and issues relating

to human interactions and transactions, – particularly related to customer service, sales and marketing – is an outcome of the realisation and need for an approach that requires a certain amount of human understanding and an approach that draws customers and business partners alike to business deals.

With this, an attempt is made to connect the meaning of „soft“ with the terms „software,“ and „soft power“ which again is connected with the business world need for the necessary skills and traits. This activity provides significant insight into the factors that influence and compel in drawing people to each other, thereby establishing a connection between the complementary skills and traits so merge them into soft skills.

However, any idea, thought or value has to proceed from a basic understanding of certain beliefs and principles, to give it the weight and importance it is accorded. Therefore, this chapter further attempts to trace the possible base of soft skills. This has been done by taking insights from the philosophies of both ancient and modern times as well as by referring to scientific studies done on human emotions. With this, the components considered as important for nurturing and building the base of soft skills are drawn. Thus, the essential ingredients for nurturing soft skills are, emotional intelligence, intrapersonal and interpersonal understanding, empathy, ability to reason and intuit – with awareness as a base from which to nurture it. This chapter stresses on the importance of awareness, which is the core of building and nurturing soft skills, and that understanding and respect are crucial for establishing connections. Thus, soft skills is one's ability to use one's dispositional attributes within the framework of a given context, for a nurturing interpersonal relationship.

Taking the above thought further, the fourth chapter titled Soft skills: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Life Skills, takes the present job market skill requirements and evaluates them from the base established in the previous chapter. This chapter points out the necessity to seek for ways to build and extend relationships across horizons, boundaries, spaces or cultures in whatever role one plays. Thus, it points out, that one may be good in communication; one may be an excellent leader or a team player and so on; but, if one does not know how to approach people, in a way that people's self-esteem or self-worth is acknowledged, there is bound to be either misunderstanding or some interpersonal disasters. This chapter stresses on the need to build one's personality and character, drawing from the base previously established.

With this, the fifth chapter titled, Need for Soft Skills in Education seeks to explain ways in which education can encourage learning and growth of soft

skills from an interdisciplinary perspective, particularly that of Humanities. This chapter looks into the possibilities of reaching out to domains where basic human traits can be encouraged and nurtured in the process of classroom learning through an alternative approach. In this context, it recommends learning soft skills through subjects that emphasises on character and personality development; subjects that develop in learners the importance of being sensitive to the emotions and experiences of people as it is to one's environment too. This chapter suggests that there should be shared rapport among those in education for learning and nurturing creativity.

Some of the significant findings:

- It is a category mistake to consider communication ability, leadership ability, managerial ability, inter-personal ability and so on as a holistic representative of soft skills in itself. Soft skills per se must have a quintessential nature, which is why the essential nature of communication will be different from that of mathematical skills, interpersonal skill, leadership skills, or other such skills. The issue here is, how two different skills, with two essential natures be considered as one and the same thing. They need to have the same quality, to qualify them as identical. This means that all these different skills are only ingredients or attributes of soft skills and soft skills is a holistic skill, the essential nature of which is the sum total of the ingredients. In this regard, it is appropriate to use „soft skills“ as an umbrella term, in which case, it is also appropriate that soft skills is expressed in singular term „is“.
- Soft skills is more than emotional intelligence. It is an integration of Humanities, Social Sciences and emotional intelligence, and its reach moves beyond the emotions to that of other human experiences which shape the perspectives of people.
- The basic value of soft skills is to build and foster relationships. In that sense, soft skills creates meaning for life. While hard skills teach the art, soft skills creates meaning of life. Meaning in life extends life

#### **Learning soft skills across disciplines:**

Soft skills as a concept can be introduced to students from early schooling so as to help young minds appreciate as well as develop traits and behaviour considered vital to the extension of healthy, meaningful life and relationships. This actually was visible in the early educational system -- although the term soft skills was not used -- where children were taught stories with morals or such messages. The focus of education then, laid a lot of emphasis on nurturing children into responsible human beings. Apart from the basic papers such as maths, science, grammar and so on, subjects such as moral science, scripture, domestic science, environment studies and health education, coupled with strong focus on cultivating appropriate social behaviour, ethics, discipline and kindness were a part of the academic curriculum; and these were foundations that made many great leaders and academicians.

However, presently, as students progress to the higher classes, due to the materialistic trend of the present civilisation, much importance has been given to the popping in of knowledge related to science, technology and wealth. At the higher level of education, although Social Sciences teach certain social skills, it still lacks a holistic perspective. A student of political science focuses only on political issues related to society; so also is the case of sociology, economics, professional courses and so on. Such exclusivity in education in the present times denies learning opportunities for students. Commenting on the present professional or skill-based education, Alexander (2015) holds that education, caught up by the idea of profit maximisation denies students the advantage of cultivating core values of socio-cultural values required for development of the mind and thereby the society at large. A very similar and opposing view on the present education is the observation of the Dalia Lama. The trend of the education system today, the Dalia Lama lamented, is more inclined towards productivity as opposed to creating humane, human beings (Nagaland Post, 11 February, 2017). To say the least, these are the ragging topics discussed on national televisions today, as it is with those who had the fortune to be a part of such education; and these are the very people, who today, lament the decline of values in schools, society and even in the work-world.

So, what are the ways in which soft skills can be taught? Academically, training in soft skills cannot be, and isn't so much about correcting behaviour. It is about helping learners get in touch with themselves, thereby helping them make necessary changes in attitude and consequently their lives too. Thus, if, as mentioned earlier, one is allowed to assume that all individuals are born with both positive and negative traits, it is only a matter of stoking and nurturing the positive traits as a dominant make up of an individual.

Harping on the importance of soft skills training for its sake is a delusion and a snare in so far as it draws one away from the core values or issues of the field. This means, that an orientation towards soft skills cannot be a result of mere application of thoughts, training and guidelines -- no matter how comprehensive, well thought or well-intentioned -- in a usual or familiar way; and there must probably be more than the regular way of teaching and learning to cultivate this nurturing ability. In that line of thought, it is felt that soft skills can also be learned through insights from other disciplines too, of which Humanities and Social Sciences too can be an alternative.

Prasad, V.R.K. (2015) held that Humanities and Social Sciences inspire creativity, and that they „play a catalytic role in applying knowledge gained through social realities“ (Prasad, 2015. 5). So, while Social Sciences deal with society and human behaviour in its social and cultural aspects and how it impacts lives and economy, Humanities contribute to a larger understanding of society and the hardcore realities of life and its circumstantial predicament. Together, Humanities and Social Sciences play a significant role in education and in that way, even one's life too. Thus, given that human issues are becoming more relevant than ever before, they have great bearing in one's life.

In this connection, one may take stories, fables and other literary work, history and political science as means for a larger understanding of human life; a bridge between customs, way of life, thoughts and peculiarities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century multi-cultural and diverse world. Such works can also be taken as a source of learning some of life's simple, but powerful lessons. One such instance is the acclaimed work of Spencer Johnson, *Who Moved My Cheese*; a highly recommended book for Business Management students, as it is for those in the corporate world. However, the story and its underlying message, is applicable to all, irrespective of discipline or age, gender or culture. This motivational tale is often taken as an effective lesson, to understand the importance of possessing a right attitude; to learn to adapt and respond to change, and to learn to stay motivated in the midst of challenges. Similarly,

Aesop's Fables allows one to learn about life lessons, just as much as how one can stay wise. Thus, stories can be taken as a fast and effective way of getting extraordinary knowledge about human nature and social life; of skills much talked about in the domain of soft skills as seen and read today.

A recent study carried out by researchers at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, at the University of Toronto, revealed that children learn moral lessons more effectively from stories with human characters, rather than stories with animal characters. The cause of this learning, it was revealed, was the ability of children to connect with human characters. Human characters actually made it possible for them to translate social lessons from these stories into their everyday life (Nagaland Post, 21 August, 2017).

No doubt, there will be those like Jurecic, Ann (2011), who question the reach of literature in the development and nurturing of emotions and social behaviour, as it is with developing critical thinking and decision making skill. While there are no concrete arguments to refute such views, a very telling thought given by O'Doherty, E. F. (1968) explained that literature does enable the reader to 'resonate emotionally' – which she stated is sometimes referred to as empathy.

Having understood the importance of learning from the various arts, writers across the globe have now started to vouch for the relevance of learning nurturing behaviour from Humanities and Social Sciences. In this connection, Anderson, Douglas (2002) observed that without Humanities, „people risk losing not only its civility but also its humanity“ (Anderson, 2002, 127). Similar views have been given by E. Odegaard Charles (1949) that Humanities can aid in humanising people as individuals; while Bush, Douglas (1959) held that students need lessons on civility, on proper behaviour and conduct and that the Humanities

Civilise, humanise, and liberate the aggressive and sensual animal, to lead him to realise his distinctively human endowments, to refine and multiply his



moments of vision, to free his better self from bondage to his ordinary self (Bush, Douglas, 1959, 41).

Visible support for learning through Humanities is also seen in the work of Lala, R.M. (1986), who held that it is time schools and universities undertook a study of leadership through the medium of history and biography. Newman, A. Stephen, & Newman, A. Stephen (2007) allowed that the speeches of

Marcus Brutus and Mark Anthony in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, can be taken as great examples to teach law students persuasive advocacy. Similarly, Alexander (2015) advocated the importance of Humanities and Social Sciences, particularly for Management Education so as to help in better understanding of humans and life in its totality.

Students need to be encouraged to connect with each other. They need to be encouraged to think and feel, which is why, in schools and colleges, literary works can be taken as effective means of developing their imagination and thoughts, to learn to understand; to develop skills as it is to nurture positive traits; learning and development that will require more than the usual activities of reading and writing. It requires an approach which will allow students to unleash or develop their creativity, that Alexander (2015) says is within the structure of socially unified value system. Again, this can be worked out only when the imagination of students is stoked. A very apt view on this thought can be seen in the work of O'Doherty, E. F. (1968), who held that „Thought can only grow if fed with ideas. It cannot grow if it is only fed with the vehicles of ideas" O'Doherty, E. F. 1968, 366); that personality development stops if they remain at the level of mere skills. This, in other words means that thoughts lead to the growth of personality, but for thought to grow, something has to be thought about.

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