

English Teachers as Soft Skills Trainers: Indian Context

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Abstract

In the 21st century globalised world, the employers prefer the candidates who have job specific skills along with soft skills. The reality is that there are an overwhelming number of candidates available for the organisations but those who have both soft skills and job specific skills are not many. It naturally, not ignoring the fact that soft skills' possessors can be more productive and practical, creates importance of soft skills for employees. Those who are recruiting new candidates are necessarily wanting soft skills in them; and those who are already employed are trained. This kind of environment has created educational institutes to design and develop their curriculum with the inclusion of soft skills. Quite logically the role of training the students for soft skills is assigned to the teachers of English. This paper explains essential soft skills which are learnt as part of culture in India and the role of English teachers as soft skills trainers.

Keywords: Soft skills, English teachers, Indian culture and trainees

Introduction

One of the impacts of globalisation is that the importance of soft skills came to light even in India even though the very existence of soft skills has been evident since the dawn of civilisation. One may question this view yelling why and what globalisation does about soft skills in countries like India where rich culture exists in every aspect of Indian life. Soft skills are life skills and they prepare us to lead a happy life and how to apply in career comfortably and satisfactorily. Indeed, in India, from bedtime stories to marriage ceremonies, from celebrating festivals to sharing experiences, folk songs to traditional dances, are to train the children and youth for life and so we can call it informal, of course real, education. The terms 'soft skills' and 'life skills' are frequently used by educationists and corporates but the essence of this is very much there in the way of life.

Often, community paves smooth paths for transferring essential skills in the form of cultural events and exercises altruistically to numberless generations. The verbal and nonverbal forms of soft skills transmitted could differ from community to community.

Definition

According to Collins latest dictionary, soft skills are defined 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’. Cambridge dictionary gives the meaning as ‘people's abilities to communicate with each other and work well together’. Oxford learners dictionary terms the same as ‘personal qualities that enable one to communicate well with other people’. According to Sean “soft skills are non-technical, intangible, personality specific skills which determines an individual's strength as "a leader, listener and negotiator, or as a conflict mediator" (2008).

From these sources and from the experts’ definitions one can understand that communication skills, teamwork and leadership skills, time management, decision making, positive attitude, interpersonal skills, adaptability, positivity, motivation, problem-solving, conflict resolution etc. which are essential to personal life and professionalism come under soft skills.

Need and Necessity of Soft Skills in Industry

If an employee has soft skills along with job specific capabilities, he/she’ll be a great support to the organisation. According to a research, hard skills contribute to only 15% of one’s success while the remaining 85% is made by soft skill (Watts M and Watts R. K, 2008). Many researches have vindicated that understanding among the teammates, sharing the information clearly, assisting the colleagues when required and socialising at work are inevitable for the progress and prosperity of any organisation. These can be termed as soft skills. These are non-technical and cannot be possessed by all. In the era of globalisation, people from different regions and cultural backgrounds have to work together. This needs coordination, cooperation among employees and this can be done only through Soft skills. It is not an exaggeration to state that the existence as well as expansion of an organisation, small one or large one, depends on the employees’ possession of soft skills. In this backdrop it's not surprising that the employers want to hire candidates with soft skills.

Soft Skills in Indian Culture

India is known to the world for its rich culture. Life skills are taught through life itself. In the form of anecdotes, sayings etc. elder people try to impart necessary skills to the young.

Festivals: Indian festivals promote togetherness. The prime objective of celebration of festivals is sharing and serving. Many of the festivals in India are celebrated with the members of the family, neighbours or villagers which creates a sense of joy and empathy. These will instil a sense of responsibility and empathy while working in organisations. The essence is aptly given: “The concept of universal brotherhood encompasses all the festivals of India and the vibrant colours, warm hospitality and infectious buoyant spirit of the Indians attract people from all over the world to take part in the Indian fairs and festivals”

Mythology: From Indian mythology we can imbibe soft skills. In some IIMs leadership and decision making are explained quoting the war scene in Mahabharata, specifically Lord Krishna's words to Arjuna (The Bhagavad Gita) to have the ability to guide the people in disastrous situations in profession and private affairs too. Examples abound in all religions and sects practised in India.

Ceremonies: Naming ceremony of a kid is to introduce the world to him and the kid to the world. In the same way puberty function is to familiarise the girl to the social world which will help her in later life in communicating and coordinating with the fellow members of the organisation or family. Marriage, housewarming, birthday celebrations etc. undeniably teach us adaptability and improve communication skills. Unfortunately, in today's world keeping the actual objective of these celebrations aside people are considering these as opportunities to exhibit status which shows mere folly and senselessness.

Literature: Through tales, fables from books like *Panchatantra*, episodes from the novels, scenes from dramas like *Satya Harischandra*, saying and anecdotes, soft skills are taught. Didactic literature is an important part of literatures of various languages in India. These offer moral instructions which include both verbal and nonverbal conduct in personal, family, home, and external activities including business.

Reasons for Attributing Soft Skills Trainers' Role to English Teachers

In the field of education imparting soft skills to students, both an opportunity and a challenge, is usually given to English teachers. There arises a question naturally. Why is it given to English teachers? Why can't other subject teachers do it? These two questions are to be answered. The main reason is that English teachers are versed in two things one is English language another one is literature. Communication is the soul of soft skills and English is being considered as a global language in this era of globalisation. English teachers with command over English language can communicate effectively with students and can train well in communication skills. As Antony rightly stated “A soft skills training includes the personal, social and professional grooming of the students. This grooming session provides the upcoming professionals a very effective platform to grow and develop into very successful personalities. So, apart from the

language acquiring task, the English teachers train the individuals to develop a well-groomed soft-skills for their successful personality. (2012)

English teachers, as they are astute lovers of literature, can grasp the ways and methods to train the students for soft skills. Literature gives the best things in the best words and in the best order about life. Some describe it as the history of the human heart. It is all about life and deeds of life. It is a well-known fact that English literature is a mine of sources and solutions. English teachers are repositories of life related issues as they study literature and analyse them based on reality in the real society keeping in view the contemporary perspectives and priorities. All these things will help the English teachers of India in shouldering their role as successful soft skills trainers. It is obvious that the teachers of other subjects may not have this much of familiarity, scope and relevance to deal with soft skills. Here are some instances from English literature which supplement English teachers to do their best in this particular training.

Leadership: There are numberless examples and narration to train the students in leadership. John Milton's famous protagonist Satan's character and words, though acted against Almighty, are enough to inspire the students to possess leadership qualities.

“To be weak is miserable doing or suffering”

“Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven”

“Awake arise or be fallen for ever”.

Tennyson's *Ulysses* provides another example “to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield”. With this kind of words English teachers can easily be successful to be an example to leadership and can inspire the students to become good leaders making them aware that the world is in dire need of good leaders.

Decision Making: Numerous situations we have in English Literature which creates importance and ways of making a good decision. For instance, in *Paradise lost Book 9* Eve's decision to go alone to work leads to how they fall and lose Eden. Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a good example for consequences of a wrong decision. Even from the lives of great personalities one can understand the impact of making a good decision. For example, John Keats, one of the greatest romantic poets, who worked as an assistant to a surgeon left the medical profession to pursue his love and passion for English poetry. By narrating such type of events and incidents English teachers can do well as soft skills trainers

Adaptability: English literature provides teachers with enough plans and possibilities to inculcate a sense of adaptability to students. No need to reemphasise the need of adaptability in the globalised world where different employees from different cultural, societal, financial, religious backgrounds work in one place. Adapt to exist and adapt to expand is the slogan of the day. The

life of David Copperfield is in Charles Dicken’s eponymous novel is only one suitable example for adaptability. Thousands of such instances can be drawn from English literature. This knowledge and expertise make the English teachers effective in Soft Skills training

Actuality

When the role of soft skills trainers is assigned to the teachers of English they do with commitment and achieve desirable goals helping the students and organisations grow professionally. Thousands of English teachers in India are shouldering this role successfully besides handling other responsibilities. But there are limitations which one cannot neglect such as training the students depends on the actual character and attitude of the teacher mostly. There are instances where English teachers, even though they are subject experts, face failures in possessing the skills before training the students which naturally leads towards nothingness instead of fruitful training.

Conclusion

Weighing all the above issues and advantages, it is rational to state that the choice of the educational institutes in assigning the task of act as soft skills trainers is sensible, productive and welcoming deed as it being proved that the teachers are playing that role successfully assuring the management of the educational institutes, students, parents and corporate sector that training the students in soft skills is building the nation.

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