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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PERCEPTION AND PRACTICES OF INTEGRATING SOFT SKILLS AND POSITIVITY TRAINING IN TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Development of soft skills is the most demanding area of education worldwide. Millennium development goals also emphasized on developing both hard as well as soft skills in order to increase human potentials. Teacher Education training programs curriculum, teaching practices and teachers standards all indicate the importance of hard skills for a professional teacher, but soft skills which gives essence to professionalism and which is the essential part of good teaching as indicated by Shaheen, Zhang, (2012) is not getting its due importance, although soft skills are directly linked with teachers and teaching success- Jessy John (2009). These skills cannot be read out from a book, these skills are embedded in a teacher's behavior and his/her practice will reflect them in students behavior. Soft Skills like Personal habits, questioning skill, good communication skills, problem solving skills, critical thinking, team building, networking, emotional and cultural sensitivity, strong work ethic, positive attitude, time management or teacher's movement; are those skills that are needed in today's educational environment. Today's teacher's curriculum is focusing more on people than on processes. Soft skills play a very important role in educational as well as in professional successful careers. Global and national demands of professional abilities are changing very fast. As Sarah Andreas (2018) says, scenario is totally changed. A decade ago high academic records with work experience were in demand, while now only hard skills are not sufficient for enhancement of career, persons with soft skills, resources, self-directed, having good communication skills are in demand. This study aims to identify perception of educational experts related to existing place, importance and process of enhancing soft skills and positivity in teacher educators through professional teacher's training program. Qualitative Data was collected through in-depth interviews from eight educationists on criteria of more than twelve years working experience in the related field. The data derived from interviews was then analyzed to deduct themes. Results of the study revealed that all experts are strongly in favor of including soft skills as essential components of teachers training programs, and it should not be taken as hidden curriculum. They identified critical thinking, communication skills, team building, time management, positive attitude and body movement as essential components of teacher's training which should be taught through micro teaching. Positivity toward work is linked with success, nonprofessional attitude of teacher's trainers and absence of microteaching from teaching practices, lack of supervision and insufficient period of training are the affecting factors. Rethinking of teaching process and teaching subjects can minimize the problems and improve the quality of teachers training programs.

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INTRODUCTION

Educationists and training experts put competency skills in two categories, soft skills and hard skills Rosli Ibrahim (2017) looks at skills as a group of personal qualities, attitude and social graces that differentiate employees.

Researches of professional training and marketing has shown that both hard and soft skills impact on job performance. This study redirected focus of professional training and specially employee's training goals to the development of soft skills According to Maniscalco (2010), soft skills refer to "[a] cluster of qualities, habits, personality traits, attitudes and social

graces. Gibbons and Lange (2000), say that soft skills are the non-cognitive abilities that are innate in individuals and are necessary for good social relationships at the workplace. Rugarcia et al., (2000) emphasized that if higher education institutes want to meet the requirements of their students' future professional lives, they must address the acquisition of such soft skills and provide the technology to support them. According to Massaro *et al.*, (2016). Presence or competencies in Soft skills enable employees to propel change in organizations (Homer, 2001; Kantrowitz, 2005). If soft skills are acquired and applied by employees, individual work performance will significantly increase. In the same way Shaheen Majid, Zhang Liming, Shen Tong Siti Raihana, Shaheen Zhang, (2012) through their research work emphasized the importance of Soft Skills for Education and Career Success. DOI10.20533/ijcdse.2042.6364.2012.0147. The study was done in Singapore which showed that majority of the respondents in research felt that soft skills were useful for social interaction as well as for career advancement. However, they did not think that these skills contribute considerably to their academic performance.

Sarah Andrea's January (2018) paper discussed effects of the decline in social capital on college graduates' soft skills. Sarah Andreas concluded that the five soft skills most needed by students are teamwork and collaboration, decision making, problem solving, time management, and critical thinking skills. Other researchers Tang Keow Nganga. Tan Chan Chanb (2015) argued that persons with soft skills are resource full, self-directed and have good communication skills and are more in demand than persons than those individuals who had a brilliant academic record with added work (Tang Keow Nganga, Tan Chan Chanb (2015). Science Direct 6th World conference on Psychology Counseling and Guidance, 14 - 16 May 2015 Critical Issues of Soft Skills Development in Teaching Professional Training:) Educators' Perspectives experience were well sought after by most of the corporate institutions. Advancement in teacher's education, curriculum and teaching process demand timely, globally accepted and drastic changes in education policy and practices. Those countries who will fail to keep pace with the developing world will left behind. In Pakistan education system is in a transformational phase. Efforts are made by higher education at all level of education for bringing positive change. Teacher education received its push during previous ten to twelve years when government received a demand from United Nations and from donors' countries. Experts were invited to evaluate the recent situation of teacher education and on the bases of their evaluation and recommendations the training program was upgraded; after a long range of workshops and training programs were conducted to train in service teachers for capacity building. It was felt necessary for the accreditation of institutes of higher education and certification of teacher education if we want qualified and trained teachers. NECTE (2009) formed and tried its best to bring positive changes in teacher education program. Drastic changes were suggested and initiated to bring output based on objectives. After spending many years and those efforts, researches indicated that we are still far behind, and teacher education programs are not up to the international standard. Teacher education program still lack many necessary components which are affecting quality, professional aptitude and behavior of teachers. There is no any topic of instruction given, related to including soft skills as part of teachers training, nor do the teachers who supervise or teach pedagogies include it in

teaching process, teacher educators are expected to prepare their lessons and deliver these lessons in the class rooms under the supervision of their teachers, but that focuses on content, activities involved, teaching aids and assessment, these teacher educators neither get any related training to use soft skills nor have adequate knowledge about them. Different researches highlighted soft skills as missing and most neglected component of teacher education program Sarah Andreas (January 2018). Experts define hard skills as mostly related to working skills like curriculum designing, planning, developing teaching aids and basic pedagogy or class room delivery of subject matter, skills that are mostly related to individual performance. While soft skills are defending by experts as Shahabdkar *et al.* (2015), Soft skills are the main content and most demanding skills not only in education but for every profession. Soft skill gives a professional attitude toward work, it bridges the gap between a person and his/her success in the profession. Tang Keow Nganga Tan Chan Chanb, Uma Devi a/p Vetriveilmanyc (2015.) For securing success in future soft skills are considered as most important part of professional training. It gives confidence to a teacher regarding his or her capabilities, makes teaching learning process interesting and fruit full and accelerate future job success. Perception develops attitude, and attitude develops behavior. Behavior transfers or develops understanding and acceptance. Importance of including Soft Skills in teachers training program is the first step towards inclusion of Soft Skills Development in teacher education program. The Malaysian Institute of Higher Learning (2006) research conducted in Malaysian Institute of Higher Education analyzed the attitude of persons, they said that "teacher trainees often over rate themselves and believe that they are well qualified and do not lack any necessary skills coupled by the belief that soft skills are part of their personal traits that is not possible to be enhanced" It was felt that they need awareness regarding their abilities and needs of soft skills for giving professional output in higher education.

Soft skills are defined by Tang Keow Nganga. (2012) as the most important and necessary for 21st century professionals. He mentioned 8 important skills 1) the thinking and Problem solving skills, 2) the good attitude, right value, 3) the knowledge and comprehension in multi-cultural societies and race, 4) appropriate leadership, 5) communication and presentation skill, 6) the responsibility for society as well as transparency and accountability. 7) The team work in multi-cultural society, and 8) the management of information technology as well as lifelong learning.

Tang Keow Nganga (2015) presented the following skills as most important 1) Innovation development. 2) Thinking skills and problem solving skills. 3) Communication skills 4) Life-long learning, and information management 5) Leadership skills 6) Teamwork force 7) Ethics and professionalism Digvijay Pachauri, Aruna Yadav (2014). Based on the research findings obtained, seven soft skills have been identified and chosen to be implemented in all institutions of teacher education. They are i) Communication skills. ii) Thinking skills and Problem solving skills. (iii) Team work force (iv) Life-long learning and Information (v) Entrepreneur skills (vi) Ethics, moral and professionalism (vii) Leadership skills. Different researchers try to find out most important soft skills as identified in the corporate sectors, persons, educators or field experts. In Malaysia a project was given to identify the most important soft skills through a priority list. Higher number was given to communication skills than to thinking

skills and problem solving skills and thirdly, life team work force. Researchers showed that Soft Skills can be included in Teacher Education curriculum through either Stand Alone Subject Model or Through Embedded Model.

Stand alone model approach of developing soft skills

Detailed courses are cautiously scheduled for this purpose. The courses in this type are often a part of the complete necessities of the training program. The numeral of courses and credits in this type be contingent on the curriculum design and the necessities of the program. But there is a problem with this model that in this case number of courses credit and time spent will be increased. This model did not afford the opportunity for students to improve and acquire soft skills as integrated with other subjects. Because the course or subject is specially developed to assist students to acquire the soft skills.

Embedded Model

This model soft skills are embedded in the teaching and learning process across the curriculum. Students are not required to take special courses specially designed for soft skills. Instead the students are trained to develop mastery over the soft skills through formal teaching and learning activities that are planned and carried out using specific strategies and methods to achieve objectives of the embedded soft skills development. Each element of soft skills is spelled out in the learning outcomes and then translated into the instructional plan for the courses. This is gained through several teaching and learning activities such as, brain storming, team work, questioning, class discussion, presentation, role play and simulation, task/project, field work, project work. This model requires the expertise of the teachers to use teaching/learning strategies and methods that require student participation in the activities. According to Pachauri Yadav (2014) if carefully planned and used, the appropriate teaching and learning strategies, this model is more effective in developing and acquiring the soft skills this research is focused on finding perception and attitude of educationists to identify the reasons behind negligent attitude toward soft skills in teacher education programs in Pakistan. Preferred model of soft skills teaching most suitable for our requirement, their suggested ways for including and teaching soft skills in teacher education program, ways to enhance teaching process by including identified soft skills in teaching curriculum. not as hidden curriculum but as active component of whole teaching process.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design: This research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. Qualitative research methods emphasize the measurement and analyses of causal relationship, not the process. It is considered as most effective method to approach while investigating a research problem. T Gray, D.E. (2014) The method helps in unfolding cause effect relation naturally in non-controlling and non-manipulative way, to give in-depth understanding of the situation and getting insight about the phenomenon Clandinin, and Huber, (2010).

Population sample strategy, criteria and size: Education experts (teacher) associated with teacher education training programs at university level were considered as population of the study. Sample of eight educationists were selected

purposely who are associated with teacher education programs at university level and having more than twelve years teaching experience, and have direct contact with the phenomenon under investigation. There are certain suggestions in literature regarding the recommended sample size of a narrative study. Creswell (2007) cites Huber & Whelan that narrative inquiry uses "one or two individuals unless a larger pool of participants is used to develop a collective story". The current study capitalizes on this view and selects 8 participants as sample like a study of the same nature conducted by Al Doubi, (2014).

Data Analyses: To get insight and understanding of the whole phenomenon understudy was discussed through open ended questions. Eight open ended question were designed and one selection opinion scale was given to the respondents, whose validity was ascertained through expert opinion through interview was collected for finding and extracting different themes. Researcher's focus reflects a balance between understanding, authenticity and reflective complexity in analyzing expert's views collected through personal interviews, keeping in context sensitivity in generalization across educational frame work. Common themes were extracted, analyzed and presented to clarify the problem understudy.

Statement of the Problem: Researchers asserted that teacher education programs lack important content of soft skills training in their curriculum and practice teaching, and teacher educators not having knowledge of how this negligence is developing an impact on their professionalism. There is a continuous concern about quality of teachers training programs and teacher's performance, Digvijay Pachauri, Aruna Yadav (2012). It is very important to know what is the present position of Soft Skills training and why it is not reflected in teacher's attitudes and application Homer, (2001).

Objectives of the Study

- To bring to the fore, perspectives and recommendations of educationists for improvement of teacher education curriculum
- To present a road map of including soft skills training in teacher education curriculum.

Research Questions

- What is the present status of soft skill training in teacher education program?
- What is the impact of not having soft skills training on teacher's performance?
- How to teach soft skills to teacher educators?
- Which model of soft skills training is most suitable for teacher education programs.

Analyses of responses: Responses collected through open ended question were transcribed in respondent's words. Riessman (2008) to present perception of the responded related to the areas of investigation as Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2002), mentioned to give a joint picture and to make bases for coding before extracting themes as Creswell (2017) suggests. Then narrative analyses were done for answering research questions. Finding are represented in graphic and analytical ways to give a clear picture.

Five different themes were emerged from the discussions

1. Status of Soft Skills in present teachers training curriculum.
1. Preferred soft skills
2. Acceptable Model of Teaching Soft Skills.
3. Teaching methods for soft skills.

Theme 1. Status of Soft Skills in present teachers training curriculum: In discussion, participants presented their ideas and showed their concern about the present status of soft skills training in teacher education curriculum. Ami said “The balance between soft and hard skills doesn’t exist in teacher education curriculum. Major focus is given to hard skills. Hairuzila, (2009). Mostly students learn soft skills through hidden curriculum not written one”. Other participants said that “it is there but in theoretical way not in practice”. Mu said “I have analyzed the curricula and found that although elements as stated are available, yet they are not functional and concrete. Hairuzila, (2009). The skills such as digitalization are not well comprehended.” Tob said “Not necessarily, it depends on the teacher who has taught them: While another member Fa said that “No, in my opinion soft skills are covered in hidden curriculum, not specifically. But the hard skills get full emphasis in teacher development”. Discussing about the situation of soft skills abilities of teacher’s educators Am said that “Teacher educators do have soft skills but there exists variation and diversity.” “As said that “They have but not functional “while Mu express that “teacher educations have knowledge about skills but the latest trends and development are missing Awe Jide (2008), “other participant Tob expressed that” It is very poor, most of the teachers lack soft skills or interpersonal skills”. Shyamala, E.D., Subramaniam, T. and Daniel, E.G.S. (2009) While in FA’s views “Teachers’ educators do have soft skills but not everyone. Secondly, these skills are their learned skills during their work experiences on their own”. Results from other researches like Digvijay Pachauri, Aruna Yadav (2012) confirm these results.

Theme 2. Value Given to Soft Skill Training: In discussion, all participant clearly showed that almost all of them are not satisfies with the training and practices of teachers. Am said “Actually, curriculum from primary to tertiary level, in our country, has a focus on cognitive domain whereas affective domain is completely overlooked”. Other participant as said that “May be the curriculum developers are not aware about these skills”. While Mu said that “Since the curricula does not focus on it, trainers lack skills to transform the same to others”. Other participant Tob said “Because generally educators don’t invest time and money in training the teachers “showing personal views, Fa said “. Professional courses for teachers’ development generally do not include soft skills as these are perceived as related to corporate sector, not to educators”.

Theme 3. Acceptable Model of Teaching Soft Skills: All the discussants were of the views that soft skills must be a part of teacher education and specially in teachers training. Am said that “Through balanced curriculum; this target can be achieved through redesigning and reshaping curriculum from primary to Ph.D. levels by giving due importance to affective domain along with cognitive and psychomotor domains”. Another participant as expressed that “it can be included in Practice Teaching by practical demonstrations”. Another expert Mu said” Through modeling and simulation and through integration of these elements into the curricula”. In view of Tob” Because it is an integral part of being a teacher and it

reflects on the students’ behavior and attitude”. In view of Fa “For personal & professional growth of teachers as well as for betterment of students and institutes, soft skills should be included in curriculum of teachers’ education programs. These skills can be taught through following PBL and other practical activities during the program. During discussion about accepted model of including soft skills in teacher’s curriculum all except one respondent were in favor of embedded model while one participant was in favor of Stand Alone Model. Participant Am said “As soft skills are related to personality and moral development therefore special focus should be given on the creation of such an environment where soft skills could boom and bloom. In every subject a unit on soft skills should be included and all teachers should develop and promote soft skills through a wide variety of teaching methods, techniques and activities. As said “These skills need to be included in all subjects, especially in teaching practice through demonstration. “Mu express his views as” These skills should be taught in line with the latest trends Massaro *et al.* (2016) also emphasized on it, embedded in all courses”. Another respondent Tob said “for emphasizing on these skills separate course can be designed and included in teacher education courses. By giving proper training and introducing continuous professional development programs these skills can be enhanced “. Fa said,” Through different scenarios and problem-based activities during various phases of teaching practice as well as during course-work”.

Theme 4. Impact of not including soft skills in training program on teacher’s performance and teaching learning process: All participant was very much concerned about lack of soft skills in teachers and extensive demand of these skills in all service area’s not only in education, but that is the top demand in all professions worldwide Shaheen Majid Zhang et al. (2012). Am said “Soft skills are basically social skills, if a student teacher lacks these skills he/she will face problems in social adjustment and can face low self-esteem as well”. As said “absence of these skill make the process of learning non-effective and takes long lasting effects”. Respondent Mu added that,” Teachers routinely practice traditional methods which affects learner’s intellectual outcomes”. In view of Tob,” The performance goes below par and they are unable to cope with the teaching process” Bailly and Léné, (2013). While Fa said, “Teachers may face communication problems in stressful situations; may experience difficulties in managing emotions; may exhibit poor leadership skills; may face difficulty in problematic situations that need tactful handling of matters in- and out of classroom”. A said that, “Without including soft skills in teacher education curriculum the objectives of this program cannot be achieved; or on the whole, Gibbons, W.D. and Lange, (2000), objectives of the program will be achieved partially. Expertise in Soft skills are directly linked with the teaching and learning because these skills enable a teacher to be more effective, efficient and acceptable Scopus Teachers have a variety of situations on-the-job that demand at least to have a certain level of soft skills. Alan D. Greenberg Andrew Nilsen (April 2015). Lack of such skills may create hurdles in performing their tasks more effectively.

Theme 5. Most Important Soft Skills: A list of thirteen soft skills was given to the participants for arranging on priority bases, the priority was given to

1. Communication skills,
2. Work ethics,
3. Team work and
4. Positivity.

Less priority was given to time management and problem solving. The least priority was given to cultural sensitivity and body movement. The trend is different from other researches as given by Tang, (2015), Gibbons and Lange, (2000), Innovation development. 2) Thinking skills and problem solving skills 3) Communication skills 4) Life-long learning, and information management. It is felt that this specific thinking trends needs further investigation as results are different from the other researches in which researchers identified priority of soft skills

DISCUSSION

The present study investigates the perception of educationists regarding present status of Soft Skills training in teacher education curriculum and the way these skills are incorporated in teaching process, it was also investigated that how these important skills can be included, and what is the best possible and suitable model for our teacher training program. The findings showed a strong empirical support from other researches that these skills are not included in the main curriculum Shahabadkar *et al.* (2015). Specially teaching practice is lacking this component which impacts negatively on teacher's performance, not only that, it also impacts on teacher- student relation Siribodhi Tinsiri, (2012), Professional relations among teachers as well as on outcomes of educational objectives. The condition is almost same in other countries like Malaysia and Thailand:

Siribodhi Tinsiri, (2012). This is one of the reason for not achieving objectives of the teachers training program. Sail and Alavi, (2010) Inexpert's opinion the best way of developing these skills is micro teaching, through which small and specific skills can be mastered, and in place of keeping it as hidden curriculum, it should be adopted as Embedded Model. Absence of soft skills like time management, good communication skills, work ethics, positivity and enthusiasm, graciousness, team work from their training is developing negative picture of the teachers. Stevens, and Campion, (1999) and they are unable to meet standard, present market demands JessyJohn (2018). Anaïs Gibert *et al.* (2016) and position in their jobs. Watts and Watts, (2008). Experts are in opinion that through micro teaching and providing properly planed special course of soft skills development should be included in teachers training programs at all level and Embedded Model is the best and suitable model for our system Massaro *et al.* (2016).

Recommendations

It is recommended that

- Soft Skills training should be included as a separate subject or be included as essential part of all courses of teacher's training programs.
- Soft skills training be given proper weightage in syllabus.
- Practical demonstration should be given by the teacher trainers before actual teaching practice.
- Micro teaching be used as way of developing soft skills in prospective teachers.
- Embedded Model be adopted to enhance soft skills.
- Further research is suggested on factors for priority of specific soft skills.

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