

SOFT SKILLS: A TOOL TO IMPROVE TEACHING COMPETENCY AMONG PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS

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Abstract: Teachers are said to be the architects of the future generations and teachers can act as role models in the lives of learners and guide them in the process of education for development. The purpose of teacher education is to generate teachers who have academic and professional competencies. The role of teachers is no longer limited to teaching alone. They need to be thorough professional, high academic standard, pedagogical and practical skills. Teacher education emphasizes the development of specific knowledge, attitude, skills and behaviour patterns which an individual requires to perform a job sufficiently. Therefore teacher education should develop soft skills which are needed for a prospective teacher to become an excellent professional teacher. Students bring excellence in teaching competency through training in soft skills of teacher education.

Index Terms: Soft skills, teaching competency, Prospective teachers

Introduction

Teaching competency refers to a set of conscious, trainable skills and abilities which make a teacher effective. It is the ability of the teacher education students' to execute a mastery level in teaching with all the capacities and skills that are needed to handle their profession. According to Paul Grim and Cyril Heyt, "Teaching competency intimately related to the goals of teaching. It refers to the knowledge, values and skills of the teacher to communicate the ideas effectively to the students".

Soft Skills

Soft skills refer to the ability to effectively communicate, participate as a team member, adapt to volatile environments, actively listen, build and lead teams or groups, use resources effectively and creatively, effectively present persuasive arguments and motivate oneself and others. It includes oral and written communication skill, computer skill, stress management skill, time management skill, leadership skill, interpersonal skill and team building skill of teacher education students.

Oral and written communication skill refers to communicate in oral and in written what they think and perceive in their mind. Computer skill refers to work on computer and to use computer in their teaching learning process. Organizing skill refers to organize all the happenings according to their own will and wish. Stress management skill refers to manage and cope up with the stress that they encounter in their classroom, school and society. Time management skill refers to calculate, budget and manage the timing according to their future goals. Leadership skill refers to lead the classroom and the school activities in an effective and enjoyable way. Interpersonal skill refers to have good rapport with their students, co-workers and the society. Teambuilding skill refers to organize all the members of the students' community and the teacher community to have peaceful and co-operative attitude among them without any prejudice.

Teaching Competency

Teaching competency refers to the performance level and skill in handling a topic to the best satisfaction of the learners. It includes introducing a lesson, explaining, questioning, varying the stimulus, non-verbal cues, reinforcement, closure and fluency in communication of teacher education students.

Teaching competency is the capacity, ability, potentiality of an individual to deliver the content, concept, theme and subject matter to the pupils in an excellent manner. Teaching competency requires suitable methodology, apt strategy and adaptation of different techniques for even the slow learners to improve their learning ability. Competencies are an attempt to shift the focus of teaching and related assessment away from superficial text book-based factual content.

Competency is nothing more than a value, the right way of doing things in a competent way, the right way to perform a job, the right way to live and work in association and cooperation with others. It means a desired quality of jobs performance. The qualities of the competency are enthusiasm, fluency, industry, neatness, originality, adaptability and thrift.

Teaching competency means an effective performance of all the observable teacher behavior that brings about desired pupil outcomes. Based on the micro criteria approach to study, 'Teaching' is perceived as a set of teaching skills, where teaching skill is a set of teaching behavior that facilitates or bring about a specific instructional objective.

Important Skills for Teachers

There are many skills to improve the teaching. Success of teaching a lesson depends on its introduction. Explaining skill makes the pupils to understand ideas, concepts and principles, a teacher has to explain vividly. Explanation skill is a set of inter – relation statements made by the teacher related to an idea or phenomenon. The questioning skill of the teacher stimulates thinking of the students. The teacher classifies and facilitates understanding of the concepts by questioning the students. In the teaching learning process questioning skill is a very significant technique. Variation in stimulus secures more attention among the students. The skill of stimulus variation, influence the teaching-learning process effectively. Non-verbal cues & Reinforcement increases the participation of the students. The appreciation for correct responses is positive reinforcement. The positive reinforcement is used for strengthening the responses or behaviours of individuals. In the skill of closure or recapitulation, the teacher can consolidate the main points by putting a few questions based on the topic taught. The questions should be logically linked to cover the whole lesson as summary of the lesson. The skill of fluency in communication is a much needed skill for the teachers to attract the students.

Prospective Teachers and Soft Skills

Students who are studying B.Ed, after completing their under graduate or post graduate are the prospective teachers. Producing quality prospective teachers with sound physical and mental health is the professional ethics of the teachers. It is also necessary to make the prospective teachers to know how to handle students of varied age, sector at work and how to relate with their peers. For that soft skill is necessary.

Soft skills provide the prospective students the potential of performing well at work while paving the way to good relationships in all areas of their life. The soft skills most often sought by employers of the teachers include:

- i. Having optimism and doing a job thoroughly and correctly
- ii. An ability to come clean and correct mistakes
- iii. Good manners, polite, flexibility and adaptability
- iv. Problem solving capacity and ability to see things from a different perspective
- v. Enjoys mentoring and teaching and is also open to learning and loves to leaning Confident but humble
- vi. Ability to work as part of a diverse team and understand to follow directions as well as the ability to think intuitively when problems arise
- vii. Common sense and ability to analyse a problem and implement a solution

Soft Skills To Improve Teaching Competency

There are many soft skills for the development of the teaching competency of prospective teachers. The following are the important and necessary soft skills needed in the 21st century:

1. Soft skills for the Connection

Soft skills for the Connection included the information literacy skill, digital literacy skill and communication skill. Information literacy is the ability to know when there is a need for information, to be able to identify, locate, evaluate, and effectively use that information for the issue or problem at hand. Digital literacy is an individual's ability to access both information and methods of communication through a technologic tools including, but not limited to, smart phones, tablets, laptops, and traditional desktop PCs. Communication skills refer to the specific types of communication used in the workplace, and include oral, written, non-verbal, and listening skills.

2. Soft skills for Creative

Creative included Soft skills are the analytical skill, problem solving skill, and creativity & innovative skill. The analytical skill is the ability to visualize, articulate, conceptualize or solve both complex and uncomplicated problems by making decisions that are sensible given the available information. Problem solving skill is that the teachers can face large or small, simple or complex and easy or difficult problems and solve these problems.

3. Soft skills for the Cooperation

Interpersonal skill, collaboration skill, and teamwork skill are the soft skills for the Cooperation. Interpersonal skills are the skills we use every day when we communicate and interact with other people, both individually and in groups. People with strong interpersonal skills are often more successful in both their professional and personal lives. Collaboration refers to the action of working with someone else in order to create something or produce something. Team means together everyone achieves more. The teacher and the students join together and enrich teaching learning process.

21st Century Soft Skills

Besides, Tang (2011) stated that Soft Skills were important and necessary during the 21st century, concluded by Crosbie (2005) including:

- 1) The thinking and problem solving skills,
- 2) The good attitude, right value,
- 3) The knowledge and comprehension in multi-lingual culture and race,
- 4) The appropriate leadership,
- 5) The communication and presentation skill,
- 6) The responsibility for society as well as transparency and accountability,
- 7) The team work in multi- cultural culture, and
- 8) The management of information technology as well as life-long learning.

Basic Steps for Soft Skills Learning

Soft skills can't be learned by just studying about them. They have to be learned through a process of change that can be difficult and uncomfortable at times, but it can have dramatic effects on our teaching competency's bottom line. The following six-step process is a basic overview:

- Willingness to Change
- Education
- Evaluation
- Self-Reflection
- Goal Setting
- Practice

This process can be done on an individual basis or in groups; it can be completed internally or with an outside facilitator; it can be used at work or at home—but the key takeaway is that it is a process. It's different than book learning and can take some time, so be patient. In the end, the time invested will be worth it—both to the student teachers and the students at the school.

Conclusion

The competency of the teachers' development in Soft Skills became the crucial factor to improve the teachers' competency in their profession into professional. Competency is the ability of a teacher manifested through a set of one year classroom behaviour, which is a resultant of the interactions between the presage and product variables of teaching within a social setting. Thus teaching process is determined by knowledge, a set of abilities, attitudes and teaching skills and soft skills which in turn determines pupil outcomes.

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