

DEVELOPMENT OF ATTITUDE SCALE FOR ASSESSMENT OF SOFT SKILLS IN SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract : Soft Skills are the Soft Skills are important skills that are required by every individual for a successful existence in this highly competitive world. 21st century recognizes its importance not only in the world of business, entrepreneurship, job market but in every sphere of life, even in the mundane household chores. The paper aims at developing an attitude scale for the senior secondary school students to evaluate and understand their attitude towards the acquisition of Soft Skills. The findings can further be correlated with the proficiency of the students in application of the soft skills in their actual lives. The pilot testing of the Attitude Scale for Assessment of Soft Skills (ASASS) was carried out initially on the sample of 28 senior secondary school students wherein 30 items were finalized and reliability was established.

Index Terms : Attitude, Soft Skills, Communication Skills, Problem Solving, Critical Thinking

1.INTRODUCTION

Soft Skills are the people's skills that are required by individuals to lead their lives successfully, other than the qualifications or the hard skills training that people acquire in their lives. It reflects the ability and capability and the rate of achievement of individuals and any organization. A soft skill can also be defined from the view of cognitive domains in the non-academic areas and it could be traits such as leadership skills, teamwork, ethics, communication skills, lifelong learning, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, negotiation abilities and many more. These skills are related to a person's ability to perform certain tasks successfully which further reflects as their ability to attain success in their careers and in their lives.

The Collins English Dictionary defines the term "soft skills" as "the ideal quality of certain forms of employment, independent of acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive and flexible attitude."

The National Business Education Association believes that soft skills are essential to staying diligent in today's scenario of the workplace. Soft skills complement and enhance skills, the skills, which are hard skills for productive outcomes in the workplace and daily living skills (Arkansas Department of Education, 2007). Hard skills are the only skills essential for professional employment and growth and can often be quantified and measured from educational backgrounds, work experience or interviews while the Soft skills are identified as an essential element which leads to the overall development and success of a person. If we consider a scenario of induction process for any job, it is not the qualifications and certifications that are only of prime importance, the soft skills such as communication skills, team building leadership qualities also play a vital role in selection and subsequent success in the field. With such demands and importance of soft skills, it is undoubtedly pertinent to include the teaching of soft skills in the curriculum to develop the

students personal and inter personal skills. To an extent, development of soft skills is also included and integrated in the curriculum designed for various schools across the country, yet the attitude of the learners is an essential element which one needs to study in order to know how far the students are able to learn these skills in the school and if they are able to apply these skills well in their lives.

This Research aims at understanding the attitude of the senior school students towards the development of soft skills in a school setting and how equipped they are to apply it in the real life context.

‘Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools’ 1997 mentions the ten core Skills as laid down by WHO. The skills are :

- Self-awareness
- Empathy
- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Decision making
- Problem Solving
- Effective communication
- Interpersonal relationships
- Coping with stress
- Coping with emotion

CBSE has included life skills education as a key component of school education. Life skills include the interpersonal skills alongside psychosocial competencies that help people communicate well, solve problems effectively, think critically with innovative ideas and creativity, build healthy relationships, understand, feel and empathize with others thereby helping people manage their lives productively in a healthy manner.

In spite of acknowledging the importance of soft skills and incorporating the important ones in the school curriculum, there still exists a gap in the efforts made and the desired outcomes. Hence, out of all these Soft skills listed, the focus of the researcher was on knowing the attitude of the senior school students towards the acquisition of the soft skills - Critical Thinking, Problem Solving and Communication Skills.

2. OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF THE KEY TERMS

Soft Skills: The term soft skills refers to personal characteristics, characteristics, and abilities that inform individuals about how they relate to others and are often used as synonyms for human or interpersonal skills.

This term describes those personal qualities, traits or attributes that mark a high level of emotional intelligence. These skills may include skills like leadership qualities, team work, communication skills, analytical thinking problem solving ability, critical thinking, life long learning and many more. Soft skills are attributes that cannot be quantified, but play an important role in many business environments.

In the study under consideration, the Soft Skills to be analysed are -

Critical Thinking : the process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information to reach an answer or conclusion

Problem Solving : Problem-solving is a mental process that involves discovering, analyzing and solving problems. The ultimate goal of problem-solving is to overcome obstacles and find a solution that best resolves the issue.

Communication Skills : the ability to convey or share ideas and feelings effectively.

Attitude: In psychology, attitude is a psychological structure, a psychological and emotional entity that can be expressed in a person or a person. They are complex and have gained experience through the state. This is an individual's tendency toward value, which is facilitated by a reactive expression of people, places, things or events (attitude objects), which in turn affects individual thoughts and behaviors. The famous psychologist Gordon Allport described this potential psychological structure as "the most unique and indispensable concept in contemporary social psychology." Attitude can be formed by one's past and present. Key themes of attitude research include attitude intensity, attitude change, consumer behavior and attitude-behavior relationship.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study undertaken was in form of a descriptive survey. A sample of 300 senior secondary school students from selected government schools and private schools in Delhi was selected.

3.1 Sampling

In the present study different multistage sampling technique was used by the researcher while selecting sample:

Stage 1. Sampling of district:

The Delhi NCT divides the Delhi area into 13 administrative districts, viz. North, Northwest A, Northwest B, Northeast, East, Middle, New Delhi, South, Southwest A, Southwest B, West A, West B and Southeast.

All the districts of Delhi were not considered for the present study. Purposive sampling was done to selected Southwest B Delhi only. Only senior secondary schools of southwest B Delhi were considered for selection of the sample.

Stage 2: Sampling of the schools:

After selection of the senior secondary schools of southwest B Delhi from the list of schools (www.edudel.nic.in/mis/dise/dise_201011/dise_schools_dt_15092011/SouthWestB/zone21.htm); The senior secondary schools were divided into two strata viz. government schools and private schools. Thus, 10 schools (5 government and 5 private senior secondary schools were selected through stratified random sampling.

Stage 3. Sampling of students (actual sample):

Random sampling (www.randomizer.org) was done from each strata and thus 150 government and 150 private senior secondary school students were selected. A total of 300 senior secondary school students were considered as the actual sample for the present study.

Distribution of the sample school wise:

SCHOOL	SAMPLE (300)
PRIVATE SCHOOL	150 students
GOVERNMENT SCHOOL	150 students

In the current study, the attitude scale scores developed by the researcher were considered to determine students' attitudes toward soft skills.

3.2 Attitude Scale for Assessment of Soft Skills (Annexure I)

Attitude scale helps to understand and measure the attitude or belief or inclination of an individual towards a social cause, issue, situation etc. The researcher developed an attitude scale based on the studies by Rees Charlotte, Sheard Charlotte and Davies Susie (2002) which led to the development of a scale to measure medical student's attitude towards Communication skills learning the Communication Skills Attitude Scale (CSAS).

In the present study, the first part of attitude scale developed contained preliminary information of the sample in terms of Name, Age, Gender, School, Class and type of school: government/private, etc. This was highly useful in getting useful information about the demography of respondents. The main component of the attitude scale was divided into three categories. Item no. 1.1-1.10, comprises of the statements related to Communication Skills, Item no. 2.1-2.10 comprises of statements related to Problem Solving Skills, Item no. 3.1-3.10 comprises of statements related to Critical Thinking Skills. The response was measured in terms of frequency and the choices given to the respondents ranged from Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree. The respondent was asked to tick any of the five choices.

3.3 Scoring Scheme

The procedure of scoring is quite simple. Scores allotted in a five point likert scale are:

Sl.no.	Response	Score for positive statements	Score for negative statements
1.	Strongly disagree	1	5
2.	Disagree	2	4
3.	Neutral	3	3
4.	Agree	4	2
5.	Strongly agree	5	1

*Item no. - 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.9, 1.10, 2.1, 2.3, 2.5, 2.6, 2.9, 3.1, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.10 comprises of positive statements

*Item no. - 1.2, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 2.2, 2.4, 2.7, 2.8, 2.10, 3.2, 3.3, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9 comprises of negative statements

Thus, the scale comprises of a total of 30 items. The maximum scores that can be obtained in the scale is 150 and the minimum score that can be obtained is 30. The positive or negative attitude of the respondents can be obtained by adding the responses of each category.

3.4 Construction of Attitude Scale

An item pool containing 30 statements for each skill under study was created and studied well. After discussion with the peers and a thorough analysis of each statement, a preliminary draft of attitude scale consisting of 36 items was prepared first. The draft comprised of 6 positive statements and 6 negative statements related to attitude towards communication skills; 6 positive and 6 negative statements related to attitude towards problem solving skills and 6 positive and 6 negative statements related to attitude towards critical thinking. The preliminary draft of the attitude scale was then forwarded to the experts working in the related field, who belonged to 5 different organizations to analyse and review the attitude scale drafted. As per the review and recommendations of the experts, 6 statements were discarded, two related to communication skills, two related to problem solving skills and two related to critical thinking skills. The final attitude scale was finalized by retaining 30 statements. Therefore, the content validity and face validity of the attitude scale was established.

The attitude scale was thereafter administered on a group of 28 students who were not part of the selected sample for the pilot study. The responses collected through the pilot study were analysed to identify non-discriminative items, i.e. the items to which all the respondents' responses were same. After the analysis, no such item was found. Then, based on the scoring scheme, score of each item was checked and allotted to 28 individual students. The reliability of the tool was measured by finding Cronbach alpha coefficient. For each respondent, scoring was done separately for positive items and negative items. Then the positive items were correlated with each other separately for communicative skills statements, problem solving skills statement and critical thinking skills statement. The reliability was found to be 0.7, 0.8 and 0.9. Likewise the negative items were correlated with each other separately for communicative skills statements, problem solving skills statement and critical thinking skills statement. The reliability was found to be 0.8, 0.8 and 0.9. The Attitude Scale is very reliable and can be used for data collection in this study. The reliability was checked automatically for accuracy through Cronbach alpha reliability in SPSS.

The formula for determining Cronbach's alpha Coefficient is:

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{c}}{\bar{v} + (N-1) \cdot \bar{c}}$$

Where:

- N = the number of items.
- \bar{c} = average covariance between item-pairs.
- \bar{v} = average variance.

4. CONCLUSION

The Attitude Scale developed by the researcher to check the positive and negative attitude of the students is a valid and reliable instrument for determining the attitude of the learners of senior secondary school. The tool developed hence intends to make a significant contribution in the field of education as it can be used to determine the attitude of the students towards Soft Skills and can be further correlated with the performance of the students in a long run. Also, the findings of the tool may further help in designing and developing ways to bring about a positive change in the student's outlook. However, the tool has a few delimitations. The validity and reliability of the tool was only established by administering it on a limited number of senior secondary school students. It is recommended that this tool may be used in other studies, in different settings and different groups with a larger sample. These 21st century skills need to be inculcated and harnessed in school education in order to reap its lifelong benefits.

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Annexure I

Attitude Scale for Assessment of Soft Skills in School Students (ASASS)

Part - I

1.1 Name.....1.2 Class.....

1.3 Age.....1.4 Gender

1.5 Name of the School.....

1.6 Stream (Science/Commerce/Humanities).....

Part - II

THE DATA COLLECTED USING THIS ATTITUDE SCALE WILL BE USED ONLY FOR RESEARCH PURPOSE. THE INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL

This is an Attitude Scale to assess your attitude towards Soft Skills. The skills that would be assessed are: Communication Skills, Critical Thinking Skills and Problem Solving Skills which are an important component of Soft Skills.

On the following pages, there are some questions and their probable answers in the columns. Read the questions carefully and please tick (✓) your answer in the column. Please note that you have to mark only one answer.

Sl. no.	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1.1	In order to be a successful student, I believe I must have good communication skills					
1.2	Nobody is going to fail their exam for having poor communication skills					
1.3	Learning communication skills has helped me respect my friends and family					
1.4	Learning communication skills has helped me participate better in group work					
1.5	Communication skills cannot be taught in schools					
1.6	I don't need good communication skills to be successful in life					
1.7	I find it difficult to take learning of communication skills seriously					
1.8	Developing communication skills should be left to students interested in literature only					
1.9	Learning communication skills is a fun filled activity					
1.10	I believe communication skills is very important for my future prospects					
2.1	Learning problem solving is very essential for dealing with daily life situations					
2.2	If given a problem, it is difficult for me to reach a possible solution					
2.3	While analyzing a problem, I believe new insights are developed					
2.4	Problem solving is more like hair splitting task which is not appreciated by my friends					
2.5	Problem solving gives an opportunity to explore diverse options					
2.6	Thinking out of the box helps steer through difficult situations					
2.7	There is no need to learn					

	problem solving as it comes naturally					
2.8	My parents and teachers are responsible for solving my problems					
2.9	Learning problem solving has improved my ability to interact with peers					
2.10	Problem solving exercise is too demanding for students					
3.1	Learning critical thinking skills has helped me develop a better view of life					
3.2	Critical thinking skills cannot be nurtured at school					
3.3	Teachers will know me for my high scores and not for my critical thinking ability					
3.4	I feel satisfied when I indulge in critical thinking					
3.5	It is important to analyse any situation deeply before drawing a conclusion					
3.6	Developing critical thinking skills is as important as clearing any exam					
3.7	I prefer being given the correct answer than figuring out myself					
3.8	It is better to rely only on gut feelings to attain any solutions					
3.9	It is no use learning critical thinking skills					
3.10	Learning critical thinking has helped me recognize other's needs & requirements					