

Impact of Soft Skills on Critical Thinking and Self Confidence of Pre-Service Teacher Trainees

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Abstract

The present paper is based on the study of impact of soft skills on critical thinking and self confidence of pre-service teacher trainees. Soft Skills refers to the practice of skill sets that are crucial to an employee's ability to work better, smarter and more effectively. Soft skills are combination of impressive behavior, positive attitude, outstanding communication skills, leadership abilities and the ability to get along with and influence others. The present study highlights three dimensions of Soft Skills : Employability Skills, Communication Skills, Higher Order Thinking Skills. The study was limited to 200 Bachelor of Education students. Self Confidence Inventory developed by Dr. Rekha Gupta (2013), Critical Thinking Questionnaire and Soft Skills Modules related to B.Ed curriculum developed by investigator were used to collect the data. The results of the study revealed that Soft Skills have overall utility for pre-service teacher trainees. A significant difference is found in the pre-test and post-test scores of pre service teacher trainees in terms of critical thinking and self confidence. The mean score of post test was found to be higher than the pre-test that revealed that soft skills have a significant and positive effect on the critical thinking and confidence of pre service teacher trainees.

KEYWORDS: soft skill education, critical thinking, self confidence, pre service teacher trainees.

Advent of globalization and the resultant competition has brought in a new paradigm of business, management and education. Complexity in life is due to the fast and recent development and competition in each and every field. Though modern era is the age of science and technology still man is not happy, with the advancements because he feels that it has made the life more complex. So as to survive in the world of cut throat competition one should possess ample amount of talent and capabilities with thorough knowledge and skills. A shift from tangible physical assets to human assets consists of intangible knowledge and skill sets. An increasing need felt to effectively manage oneself, team for a teacher as well as pre-service teacher trainees. A deeper understanding and greater adaptation to different customs, manners and people across the globe are necessary to survive in today's era. Issues like interpersonal behavior, communication, presentation skills, conflict handling, task management, people development, negotiation, coaching, training skills and other generic competencies which were hitherto considered not very important, have now become essential for individuals.

Being skillful is rewarding lifelong and to be skillful, is important in all walks of life and doubtlessly to have skill in one's hand is just like having a magical wand. Moreover, being skillful is an added advantage over others. A teacher is an ideal and a role model for the pre-service teacher trainees whom they want to follow in their every

path of life, so it become the duty of a teacher to have complete knowledge and hold over the subject matter and certain other skills as required to deal with the pre-service teacher trainees they want to motivate.

To make the society worth living, it becomes the duty of a teacher to mould the behaviour of the child. For this purpose one needs to have proper hold on certain skills such as communication, problem solving, Critical Thinking, developed self-confidence and spirits of adjustment and leadership. They can acquire such skills by getting professional knowledge as would be teachers and with the help of training as core equipment for the excellence in the field of education.

SOFT SKILLS

Soft skills are an essential dimension and a corner stone of an ideal person. It can simply be defined as a personality trait which is extremely crucial for succeeding in our career and to live a better live. Soft skills usually include communication skills, communication language, ability to express our ideas and related areas. These aspects are very important if one wants to succeed in life and live a proper life. Soft skills usually are dependent on the inner self of the person and not the physical body of a person. They usually test the endurance and mental strength more than the physical strength. Hence, the soft skills like communication skills need to be improved by every person in order to excel in social life. Today soft skills are more sorts after than the technical abilities of a person and hence these have a prominent place in deciding the fate of a person in this modern world.

Soft skills are personal attributes that enhance an individual's interaction, performance and carrier prospects. Soft skills are related to a person's ability to interact effectively with others. These are behavioural competencies also known as interpersonal skills or people skills. They include proficiencies such as communication skills, conflict resolution and negotiation, personal effectiveness, creative problem solving, strategic thinking, team building, influencing skills and selling skills, to name a few. The present study highlights following dimensions of Soft Skills : Employability Skills, Communication Skills, Higher Order Thinking Skills(HOTS)

Employability Skills

Employability Skills can be defined as the transferable skills needed by an individual to make them 'employable'. Along with good technical understanding and subject knowledge, employers often outline a set of skills that they want from an employee. These skills are what they believe will equip the employee to carry out their role to the best of their ability. Employability depends on one's knowledge, skills and attitudes, how one uses those assets, and how one presents them to the employers.

Employability skills are those basic skills necessary for getting, keeping, and doing well on a job. These skills can be categorised in form of technical skills, aptitude, placement grooming, cooperative attitude, soft skills, interview skills and real-time internship. These are the skills, attitudes and actions that enable workers to get along with their fellow workers and supervisors and to make sound, critical decisions such as: Curriculum Vitae, Mock Interview, Job Application Writing, Job Searching Skills, SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis and Job Maintenance Skills.

Communication Skills

Being able to communicate effectively is the most important of all life skills. Communication is simply the act of transferring information from one place to another, whether this be vocally (using voice), written (using printed or digital media such as books, magazines, websites or emails), visually (using logos, maps, charts or graphs) or non-verbally (using body language, gestures and the tone and pitch of voice). How well this information can be transmitted and received is a measure of how good our communication skills are.

Developing your communication skills can help all aspects of your life, from your professional life to social gatherings and everything in between. The ability to communicate information accurately, clearly and as intended, is a vital life skill and something that should not be overlooked. It's never too late to work on your communication skills and by doing so improve your quality of life. Communication skills are important to everyone - they are how we give and receive information and convey our ideas and opinions with those around us. Communication comes in many forms: Verbal (sounds, language, and tone of voice), Aural (listening and hearing), Non-verbal (facial expressions, body language, and posture), Written (journals, emails, blogs, and text messages), Visual (signs, symbols, and pictures).

Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)

A person who can think critically, act logically, and evaluate situations to make decisions and solve problems, is a valuable asset. Application of higher order thinking skills in the use of technology, instruments, tools and information systems takes these higher order skills to a new level making the employee even more valuable.

Higher Order Thinking Skills involve a continuous process starting from identification of a problem, exploring the information through various channels and by creating new ideas, then to select the best possible by taking into consideration all the pros and cons concerning to the problem, then developing the possible test or tools to support once findings and finally critically evaluating the possible results. The ability to think, reason, and make sound decisions is crucial for employees desiring to do well and advance. There are certain higher order skills which helps in making the employee even more valuable involving activities such as Group Discussions and Debates which in turn enhance the: Learning, Reasoning, Thinking Creatively, Decisions Making, Problem Solving

Oxford Dictionaries (2013) defines, "Soft skills as personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people".

Soft Skills are the cluster of personality traits, social grace, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness and optimism that characterized relationships with other people. Grooming of the pre-service teacher trainees with soft skills will enable them to take part effectively in various selection procedures, handle various situations they are likely to come across in their professional careers, become critical thinkers and make them ready to get a head start in the world of education.

Soft Skills are the attributes of an individual's personality, which has a capacity to distinguish the individual from others. Soft Skills are the cluster of personality traits, social grace, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness and optimism that

characterized relationships with other people. To stand in the competition and to establish a good rapport with the students there is an ample need for Soft Skills for Pre-Service Teacher Trainees.

CRITICAL THINKING

Critical Thinking is a type of thinking that helps a person in stepping aside from his personal beliefs, prejudices and opinions to sort out the facts and discover the truth, even at the expense of his basic belief system. It is high order well-disciplined thought process which involve the use of cognitive skills like conceptualization, interpretation, analysis, synthesis and evaluation for arriving at a unbiased, valid and reliable judgment of the gathered or communicated information or data as a guide of one's belief and actions. This process incorporates passion and creativity, but guides man with discipline, practicability and common sense.

Robert H. Ennis, (1987) defines Critical Thinking as “reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do”.

Analysing the above definition, Critical Thinking is that mode of thinking — about any subject, content, or problem — in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skilfully analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing it. It is the power of Critical Thinking which enables an individual to develop Self-Confidence and handle difficult situations calmly.

SELF CONFIDENCE

Self-Confidence is one of the unique personality traits. It is the positive attitude of one's self towards one, own self-concept. It is an attribute of perceived self. Self Confidence refers to person's perceived ability to tackle the situations successfully without learning on others to have appositve self-evaluation. Self-Confidence is situational—not absolute. It is important to remember that Self-Confidence is always relative to the task and situation. We have different levels of confidence in different situations. Self-Confidence is not just one thing. It means different thing to different people. Some define it as “*trust or firm belief in self*” while some refer to it as “*self-reliance*” and some others equate with ‘*boldness*’. Truly speaking, Self-Confidence is more than these definitions. We can say that it is a dynamic state of mind not static one. Self-Confidence reflects a person's overall self-appraisal of his worth. It is an attitude which allows individual to have a positive yet realistic view of themselves and their situations. It is characterized by assertiveness, optimism, eagerness, affection, pride, independence and trust, the ability to handle criticism, emotional maturity and the ability to accurately assess our capabilities.

Good (1959) defines “Self Confidence as faith in one's ability”.

Webster Dictionary (2001) describes Self Confidence, “as confidence in one's self and one's power and abilities”.

Self-Confident is an attitude which allows individuals to have positive yet realistic views of themselves and their situations. Self-Confident people trust their abilities, have general sense of control in their lives and believed that they will be able to do what they wish plan and expect.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The present study was carried out with the following objectives:

1. To find out the impact of Soft Skills on Critical Thinking of pre-service teacher trainees.
2. To find out the effect of Soft Skills on Self Confidence of pre-service teacher trainees.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- There exists no significant difference in pre and post test scores of Critical Thinking of pre-service teacher trainees.
- There exists no significant difference in pre and post test scores of Self Confidence of pre-service teacher trainees.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

In today's competitive world, minimum acceptable skills are being replaced with higher standards. Exceptional soft skills lead to the ability to start and maintain a very good relationship with everyone. In an increasingly competitive world of business and industry, these skills are not optional but it is the skills that determine individual performance and leading to organizational excellence. The application of soft skills is not just limited to professional life as it is very important in every aspect of one's daily life such as personal and social life as well. An individual's social popularity, acceptability and extent to which one feels valued and appreciated in social and family life depends on how well he presents himself and influences others. Effective soft skills are critical in today's service industry and they can a cause of differentiation between excellence and mediocrity.

Interpersonal communication, business ethics, effective presentations skills, e-mail etiquettes, self-awareness, persistence, confidence, self-motivation, trustworthiness, adaptability and talent for building relationships, have more significance in today's professional life and can no longer be ignored. So it is evident that good level of soft skills can help in managing oneself and also deal with people more effectively. Soft-skilled people will have an increased awareness of own personality features and that of others which will help them to manage self and team to achieve better results. One will also need to seek opportunity to practice soft skills to enhance and sharpen individual soft-skill inventory. So, the investigator is interested to find out the effect of Soft Skills on Critical Thinking and self-confidence of pre-service teachers.

Tamkin (2004) conducted a study on "Skills Pay: The Contribution of Skills to Business Success" and revealed that the most forms of qualifications and training leading to the enhancement of skills produce benefits to individuals and to the firm. Studies suggest that a more highly skilled workforce is associated with higher productivity and other positive organisational outcomes. The skills demanded also vary by occupation. Many key results emerged in this study. Lack of communication skills amongst applicants was observed as very critical in important administrative and secretarial occupations and also sales and customer service vacancies. It was also significant for managers, personal service and elementary occupations. Customer handling skills were found particularly difficult to obtain from applicants for the same set of occupations. Team working skill was less of a problem amongst professional and associate

professionals, but sought more in connection with managers, operatives in personal service, sales, customer service and elementary occupations. Problem solving was mentioned mainly in relation to managers, senior officials, administrative and secretarial occupations. Management skills were mentioned mainly in relation to managers and senior officials

Method

The present research was an experimental study in which a pre-test was conducted related to Critical Thinking and Self- Confidence of pre service teacher trainees. The treatment in form of Soft Skills were given to the groups and a post test was employed. The learning outcomes of both the groups were compared. Questionnaire was prepared to find out student’s response regarding Soft Skills Education.

SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

The research was conducted on the purposive sampling based technique; a sample of 200 teacher trainees was taken.

TOOLS USED

Following tools were used in the present study for the purpose of data collection:

- Self Confidence Inventory developed by Dr. Rekha Gupta (2013).
- Critical Thinking Questionnaire developed by investigator.
- Soft Skills Modules related to B.Ed curriculum.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The present study employed a pre-test and post-test. Experimental design where Critical thinking and Self Confidence as dependent variables and Soft Skills as treatment had given. The impact of Soft Skills on Critical Thinking and Self-Confidence constitutes the major motive of the present research.

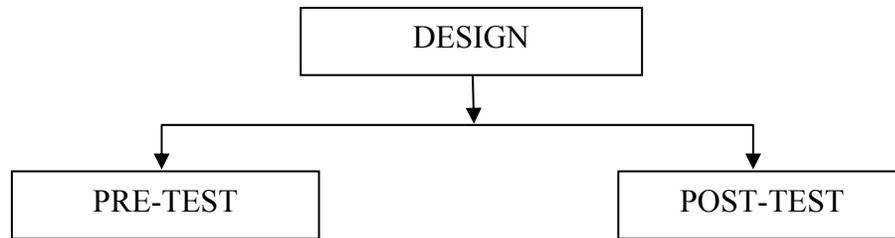


Figure 1:Design of the Study

PRE-TEST

Critical Thinking Questionnaire
 Self Confidence Inventory

TREATMENT

Soft Skills sessions held throughout the session

POST-TEST

Critical Thinking Questionnaire

Self Confidence Inventory

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

SIGNIFICANCE OF DIFFERENCE OF MEANS

To investigate the significance of difference between the means of pre-test and post-test scores, if any, in critical thinking and self confidence among pre-service teacher trainees, the pre-service teacher trainees were assessed in terms of their scores in Critical Thinking Questionnaire (2013) by investigator and Self Confidence Inventory (2013) by Rekha Gupta and t-test was employed.

Table 1: Significance of Difference between Means of Pre-Test and Post-Test of Pre-service Teacher Trainees on the variable of Critical Thinking

S.No.	Group	Variable	N	M	S.D	SE _M	t-ratio
1.	Pre-test	Critical Thinking	200	19.52	4.65	0.33	23.67**
	Post-test		200	24.39	3.76	0.27	

***Significant at .01 level*

Table 1 revealed that

- the mean scores of critical thinking of pre-service teacher trainees on pre-test and post-test as 19.52 and 24.39 respectively and their standard deviation as 4.65 and 3.76 respectively. The t-ratio is 23.67 with $d_f=198$ which is significant at .01 level of confidence. This revealed that a significant difference exists between mean scores critical thinking of pre-service teacher trainees on pre-test and post-test.

Therefore the hypothesis 2 stating that there will be no significant difference in pre-test and post-test scores of critical thinking of pre-service teacher trainees stands rejected.

As mean score of pre-service teacher trainees in post-test is significantly higher than that in pre-test on the variable of critical thinking, it may further be concluded that Soft Skills improve the critical thinking among pre-service teacher trainees.

Fig. 2: Bar Graph showing Difference between Means of Pre-Test and Post-Test of Pre-service Teacher Trainees on the variable of Critical Thinking

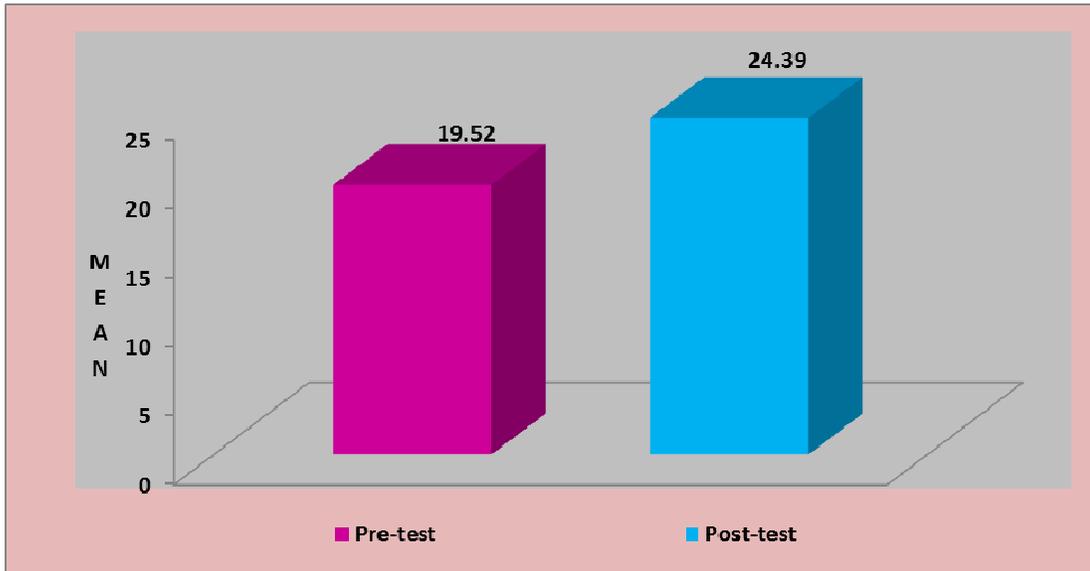


Table 2: Significance of Difference between Means of Pre-Test and Post-Test of Pre-service Teacher Trainees on the variable of Self Confidence

S.No.	Group	Variable	N	M	S.D	SE _M	t-ratio
1.	Pre-test	Self confidence	200	24.46	6.82	0.48	11.51**
	Post-test		200	28.46	5.70	0.40	

**Significant at .01 level

Table 2 revealed that

- the mean scores of self confidence of pre-service teacher trainees on pre-test and post-test as 24.46 and 28.46 respectively and their standard deviation as 6.82 and 5.70 respectively. The t-ratio is 11.51 with $d_f = 198$ which is significant at .01 level of confidence. This revealed that a significant difference exists between mean scores self confidence of pre-service teacher trainees on pre-test and post-test.

Therefore the hypothesis 2 stating that there will be no significant difference in pre-test and post-test scores of self confidence of pre-service teacher trainees stands rejected.

As mean score of pre-service teacher trainees in post-test is significantly higher than that in pre-test on the variable of self confidence, it may further be concluded that Soft Skills improve the self confidence among pre-service teacher trainees.

Fig. 3: Bar Graph showing Difference between Means of Pre-Test and Post-Test of Pre-service Teacher Trainees on the variable of Self Confidence



Conclusions

On the basis of the analysis of data, following conclusions can be drawn:

- A significant difference exists between mean scores Critical Thinking of pre-service teacher trainees on pre-test and post-test. As mean score of pre-service teacher trainees in post-test is significantly higher than that in pre-test on the variable of Critical Thinking, it may further be concluded that Soft Skills improve the Critical Thinking among pre-service teacher trainees.
- A significant difference exists between mean scores self confidence of pre-service teacher trainees on pre-test and post-test. As mean score of pre-service teacher trainees in post-test is significantly higher than that in pre-test on the variable of self confidence, it may further be concluded that Soft Skills improve the self confidence among pre-service teacher trainees.
- The Soft Skills have overall utility for pre-service teacher trainees.

• EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Any research that is undertaken can be considered complete only if it contributes to the future development of research topic in the field of its application. Soft Skills are learned behaviours which require training and focussed application. Soft Skills will enable students with a strong conceptual and practical framework to build, develop and manage teams. Soft Skills play an important role in the development of the students' overall personality, thereby enhancing their career prospects. Soft Skills are imparted to fine-tune the student's attitudes, values, beliefs, motivation, desires, feelings, eagerness to learn, willingness to share and embrace new ideas, goal orientation,

flexibility, persuasion, futuristic thinking, comparison, diplomacy and various skills sets of communication, manners and etiquette so that they will be able to deal with different situations diligently and responsibly.

Soft Skills strengthen the individuals from within. These Skills empower them to understand 'Who They are' and how best they can come across as competent individuals in any given situation. So, Soft Skills in turn lead to the development of various skills among the pre service trainees that in turn definitely help them in future success in their profession. Training in Soft Skills provides strong practical orientation to the students and help them in building and improving their skills in communication, the effective use of English, business correspondence, presentations, team-building, leadership, time management, group discussions, interviews and interpersonal skills. It also helps students in career visioning and planning, effective resume writing and dealing with placement consultants and head hunters. Various teacher training institutes can adopt these type of programmes in the curriculum to enhance the life skills among pre service teacher trainees.

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