



AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON DEMOGRAPHIC CORRELATES OF SOFT SKILLS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF MANAGEMENT STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Soft skills are the interpersonal qualities that are considered as an important attribute in job applicants. This paper emphasised on the importance of soft skills from the management student perspective with the help of structured questionnaire taking 126 respondents among which 64 respondents are from MBA (Regular), 60 are from MBA (5 years Integrated program) and 2 of them are from BBA. It is an attempt to find the role of the demographic characteristics like age, gender and education together with student's perception about the components of soft skills like presentation skills, leadership skills, language proficiency, oral communication and nonverbal communication.

Keywords: Soft skills, Interpersonal Skills, Management Students

JEL Code: J10, J21, J24

Introduction

Soft skills are the traits, attributes and interpersonal skills that enhance an individual's interactions and his/her relationship with others. Soft skills are considered as important as hard skills, which include person's knowledge and occupational skills. Important Soft skills include Good manners, Optimism, Common sense, a sense of humour, empathy and the ability to

collaborate and negotiate (Rouse, 2015). Graduates are expected to have good soft skills in order to match up with the corporate life for employment.

According to Debbie Hance of the Association of British psychologists¹, hard skills enable a person to perform well in academia and in interviews, but its soft skills that enable him/her the job.” People dream of a good and decent job after entering into higher education, and for that they fill their resumes with many certificates. Jide Awe, Founder, Jidaw.com said, “*no matter how “good” you think you are, you will not get success in the corporate world, you feel you deserve, if you cannot well communicate with your colleagues or clients*”²(Awe, 2008). Among all the soft skills, communication skill plays a very important role in one’s life as well as profession. Sean Hewitt said, “*Employers value softskills because research suggests that they are just as good an indicator of jobperformance as traditional job qualifications.*”³

Thacker & Yost (2002), Noted in the research that students needed to be given training to be effective team members. Similarly, Mayur Kumar Gadewar, an ERP consultant with Price Waterhouse Coopers, said, “*It is essential to be technically sound, but one should also have the ability to convey the technical knowledge to the masses in the simplest possible manner.*”⁴

Literature review

Gautam (2014) had gone through the study which emphasised that students had enough qualification for the job but lacks soft skills, which had become the mandatory qualification for entering into the corporate world. Only hard skills were not enough to get success in corporate world. Recruiters preferred to appoint those who were resourceful, ethical and had good soft skills. The real key to the success of professionals was their ability to put their knowledge into effective practice.

Roble (2012) had undertaken the study on Executive Perceptions of the Top ten Soft Skills needed in workplace. His study emphasised that Business Executives considered soft skills a very important attribute in job applicants. The study identified the Top ten soft skills perceived by the

¹Debbie Hance of the Association of British psychologists

²Jide Awe (2008), founder, [Jidaw.com](http://www.jidaw.com) “Eight Great Reasons to Develop your soft skills”
<http://certification.about.com/od/certificationsbytopic/a/softskills.htm> accessed on March 12, 2016.

³SeanHewitt(2008), [Askmen.com](http://www.askmen.com), http://www.askmen.com/money/career_100/121_career.html accessed on March 13, 2016

⁴Mayur Kumar Gadewar, an ERP consultant with Price Waterhouse Coopers.

Business Executives: integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, social skills, positive attitude, professionalism, flexibility, teamwork, and work ethic.

Schulz(2008) had undertaken a study which showed the importance of soft skills in student life both at college and after college. It had also shown how soft skills complement hard skills, which were considered as the technical requirement of the job by helping an individual to shape his/her personality. On the other hand, Ngah (2015) had undertaken a study where the objective was to discover awareness and perception of engineering students towards the importance of soft skills. According to their study, Lack of soft skills was one of the factors which contribute towards unemployment among graduates in Malaysia. Authors highlighted that in few of the cases, graduates were not employed to a better position just because they did not possess good soft skills. Therefore, it was necessary for the student to make them more marketable by adding value through soft skills.

Similarly, Seetha(2013) had undergone the study which emphasised on the importance of soft skills in student's life. According to the author, hard skills were not enough for a student to get a good job. Soft skills such as communication, leadership and team building had become critical for hiring and promoting employees. Her study emphasised on including soft skills training programs in curriculum highlighted the objectives of soft skills and various teaching methods to be implemented.

Shekhawat(August, 2012) had done a study on "The importance of soft skills training in the curriculum of higher education." According to the author, soft skills played an important role in shaping up the mind of future leaders. Students could become the leaders only if they were adorned soft skills along with the technical skills. Students were more concerned with marks rather than self-development. In India, because of the large number of students in classrooms, soft skill components such as presentation skills; case study methodology could not be implemented in its proper spirit as the teacher could not provide one to one teaching with such huge group of students.

(Weiss)had explained in his study the importance of gender diversity in the work place and the required skills. His study highlighted that, diversity could encourage a more balanced view ofproblems and an increased richness of decision making through consideration of different viewpoints and perspectives. One of the important soft skill was the communication skill.

Deborah Tannen⁵ is a leading researcher on female and male communication. According to her, the goal for man in interpersonal communication was to establish status, hierarchy and power. If a manager recognised that misunderstanding between man and woman at work place could often result into gender-specific behaviour, then they had chance to practice new set of behaviour.

A very important role which management students were required to play was the role of a good leader. Nganga (April 2012) had conducted the study on “Leadership soft skills”. The study mainly focused on leadership soft skills, team work, communication skills, people development, personal effectiveness, planning, organizing, and presentation skills. Management students as a leader were needed to be master of soft skills because organization was driven by those who could demonstrate their ability to achieve excellence in the field. The paper mainly focused on the importance of leadership soft skills among higher education institutions. Thus, leadership soft skills could be seen as providing a vital contribution for organization. Yadav (2014) had undergone a study where it was found that soft skills and learning process were also necessary for faculties. The curriculum of teacher education should also include soft skills rather than just hard skills. According to the author, seven soft skills included in teacher development programs were : Communicative skills, thinking & problem solving skills, team work-force, life-long learning and Information Management, Entrepreneur skill, Ethics, moral and professionalism and Leadership skills.

Literature Gap

After reviewing the Soft skills Literature; it was found that very few studies had been conducted on importance of soft skills among the management student in graduation and Post-graduation specifically in North Gujarat. Even the student’s perception on soft skills was missing in certain portions. This implies that there was a need to understand the perception of student towards soft skills for the employability. The broad aim of the study was to analyse the perception of students towards different soft skills.

Objective of the study

1. To study the importance of soft skills with respect to education level of management students.
2. To study the importance of soft skills with respect to age group of management students.

⁵Deborah Tannen - American academic and professor of linguistics at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C

3. To study the importance of soft skills with respect to gender of management students.

Hypothesis to be tested

H0 1: There is no significant difference between importance of presentation skills, language proficiency, oral communication, nonverbal communication and leadership skills with respect to education level of management students.

H0 2: There is no significant difference between importance of presentation skills, language proficiency, oral communication, nonverbal communication and leadership skills with respect to age of management students.

H0 3: The belief that all the management student possesses the relevant soft skills is not dependent on **H0 3 (a) Education, H0 3 (b) Age and H0 3 (c) Gender.**

H0 4: There is no significant difference between importance of presentation skills, language proficiency, oral communication, nonverbal communication and leadership skills with respect to gender of management students.

H0 5: The perspective that self-management skills are important to be inculcate in B-School students is independent of **H0 5 (a) Education, H0 5 (b) Age and H0 5 (c) Gender.**

Research Methodology

Management students of a deemed university in Gujarat constitute the population for the study. The sample size is 126 respondents including 64 from MBA (Regular), 60 from MBA (Integrated) and 2 respondents from BBA program drawn using simple random sampling method. As the study is empirical in nature it is based on survey research. Primary data is collected with the help of a questionnaire designed for the purpose of the study. Questionnaire consists of two section – the first section presents questions related to soft skills and the second section provides demographic details of the respondents. Most of the questions were based on 5-point scale which includes strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neutral (N), disagree (DA) and strongly disagree (SD).

Analysis and Results

H0 1: There is no significant difference between importance of presentation skills, language proficiency, oral communication, nonverbal communication and leadership skills with respect to education level of management students.

A one way ANOVA was conducted to compare the significant difference in the level of importance regarding components of soft skills and different education groups. The above data reflect that all the components; Presentation skills, language proficiency, oral communication, nonverbal communication and leadership skills had no influence of different education groups. This was tested at $p < 0.05$ level with three conditions [(F (2,123) = 1.381, $p = 0.255$), (F (2,123) = 1.120, $p = 0.330$), (F (2,123) = 2.818, $p = 0.064$), (F (2,123) = 1.767, $p = 0.175$), (F (2,123) = 1.320, $p = 0.271$)]. The results were providing that there was no influence of education on all the five components of soft skills; Presentation skills, oral communication, nonverbal communication and leadership skills. Hence, null hypothesis was accepted.

H0 2: There is no significant difference between importance of presentation skills, language proficiency, oral communication, nonverbal communication and leadership skills with respect to age of management students.

A one way ANOVA was conducted to compare the significant difference in the level of importance regarding components of soft skills and different age groups. The above data reflect that only two components language proficiency and oral communication had influence of age. It was tested at $P < 0.05$ level with two conditions [(F (1,124) = 2.858, $p = 0.012$), F (1,124) = 7.855, $p = 0.006$]. The results were providing that different age groups had significant impact on these two components of soft skills; language proficiency and oral communication. Hence, the null hypothesis was not accepted. The rest components; Presentation skills, nonverbal communication and leadership skills had no influence of different age groups. This was also tested at $p < 0.05$ level with three conditions [(F (1,124) = 1.358, $p = 0.246$), (F (1,124) = 3.020, $p = 0.085$), (F (1,124) = 2.908, $p = 0.091$)]. The results were providing that there was no influence of age on other three components of soft skills; Presentation skills, nonverbal communication and leadership skills. Hence, null hypothesis was accepted.

H0 3: The belief that all the management student possesses the relevant soft skills is not dependent on **H0 3 (a) Education, H0 3 (b) Age and H0 3 (c) Gender.**

H0 3 (a): A chi-square test was performed and no relationship was found between education and belief that all the management students possess the relevant soft skills, $X^2 (2, N = 126) = 5.746, p = .057$. The result shows that the belief that all the management student possesses the relevant soft skills is independent of education.

H0 3 (b): A chi-square test was performed and relationship was found between age and belief that all the management students possess the relevant soft skills, $X^2 (1, N = 126) = 13.127, p = .00$. The result shows that the belief that all the management student possesses the relevant soft skills is dependent of age.

H0 3 (c): A chi-square test was performed and no relationship was found between gender and belief that all the management students possess the relevant soft skills, $X^2 (1, N = 126) = 0.304, p = .362$. The result shows that the belief that all the management student possesses the relevant soft skills is independent of gender.

H0 4: There is no significant difference between importance of presentation skills, language proficiency, oral communication, nonverbal communication and leadership skills with respect to gender of management students.

A one way ANOVA was conducted to compare the significant difference in the level of importance regarding components of soft skills and gender. The above data reflect that only one component Oral communication had influence of gender. It was tested at $P < 0.05$ level with one condition [$F (1,124) = 5.688, p = 0.019$]. The results were providing that different gender groups had significant impact on this component of soft skills; oral communication. Hence, the null hypothesis was not accepted. The rest components; Presentation skills, language proficiency, nonverbal communication and leadership skills had no influence of different gender groups. This was also tested at $p < 0.05$ level with three conditions [$F (1,124) = 0.588, p = 0.445$), ($F (1,124) = 3.013, p = 0.085$), ($F (1,124) = 0.328, p = 0.568$), ($F (1,124) = 0.545, p = 0.462$)]. The results were providing that there was no influence of gender on other four components of soft skills; Presentation skills, oral communication, nonverbal communication and leadership skills. Hence, null hypothesis was accepted.

H0 5: The perspective that self-management skills are important to be inculcate in B-School students is independent of **H0 5 (a) Education, H0 5 (b) Age and H0 5 (c) Gender.**

H0 5 (a): A chi-square test was performed and no relationship was found between education and perspective that self-management skills are important to be inculcate in B-School students, $X^2 (2, N = 126) = 5.015, p = .081$. The result shows that the perspective that self-management skills are important to be inculcate in B-School students is independent of education.

H0 5 (b): A chi-square test was performed and relationship was found between age and perspective that self-management skills are important to be inculcate in B-School students, $X^2 (1, N = 126) = 6.362, p = .011$. The result shows that the perspective that self-management skills are important to be inculcate in B-School students is dependent of age.

H0 5 (c): A chi-square test was performed and no relationship was found between gender and perspective that self-management skills are important to be inculcate in B-School students, $X^2 (1, N = 126) = 0.086, p = .465$. The result shows that the perspective that self-management skills are important to be inculcate in B-School students is independent of gender.

Findings

Importance of soft skills with respect to education level of management student

From the study it was found that education had no influence on the components of soft skills like presentation skills, language proficiency and leadership skills. All the respondents irrespective of their education level believed that soft skills were important for the management students while most of the post graduates believed that self-management was equally important for the B-school students. About 64 per cent respondents agreed that all college students did not possessed the relevant soft skills including 56 per cent from post-graduation.

Importance of soft skills with respect to Age group of management student

From the study it was found that age had an impact on two components of soft skills i.e., language proficiency and oral communication in management students while other components like presentation skills, nonverbal communication and leadership skills do not have any impact of age on management students. Most of the respondents who believed that soft skills were important for the management students were between the age group of 20-25 years. 64

respondents who were between the age group of 20-25 believed that self-management was important for the management students while 31 respondents whose age was less than 20 years believed that self-management skill was not that much important. From 45 respondents who believed that all college students possessed the relevant soft skills; 31 of them were between the age group of 20-25. This concluded that most of the respondents whose age was less than 20 years believed that all college students do not possessed the relevant soft skills.

Importance of soft skills with respect to Gender of management student

From the study it was found that gender had an impact on only oral communication while it did not have any impact on presentation skills, language proficiency, nonverbal communication or leadership skills. All the respondents irrespective of their gender believed that soft skills were important for the management students. About 74 per cent of the female respondents believed that self-management was important for the management students. From total 91 respondents who believed that self-management was important for the management student; about 64 per cent of them were male. From total 80 males; 62 per cent male and from total 46 females; 67 per cent females believed that all college students did not possessed the relevant soft skills.

Conclusion

In today's changing market scenario where with the good academic records and other practical experience it is very important to have soft skills. For the management graduates soft skill is an important quality required for their employability. The various soft skills required for the students with the academic qualifications are communication skills, leadership skills, decision making skills, problem solving skills, etc which would help them to get better opportunity to learn various technical skills when they enter the corporate world. As far as importance of soft skills is concern; all the BBA, MBA (Regular) and MBA (Integrated) students had similar response that the presentation skills, language proficiency, oral communication, nonverbal communication and leadership skills are required and important for them. It can also be concluded that in the age group of 20 and less than 20, the students don't understand and do not possess the relevant soft skills which is required for management students. So, from this research it can be concluded that with the subjects of management; the equal emphasis has to be given to the soft skills to improve the employability skills among the student.

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