

# Harness Soft Skills to Everyday Life: A Scientific Technique to Gain Success

Suman Gupta, Neetu Shukla Mishra, Indu Babra Kumar

**Abstract :** *Twenty first Century skills comprise the skills and abilities that are required by every individual to attain success in life. These skills are also commonly known as Soft Skills and are not only a pre requisite for any employment opportunity but are also highly valued in any classroom or profession. Unfortunately, despite the huge importance laid on the development of these skills, there exists a gap between the skills required for the success in life and the skills harnessed in the classrooms. A study was undertaken to find out the attitude of the senior secondary school students and the application of the soft skills in their real life. The findings revealed that the attitude of the learners towards the acquisition of these skills is vagrant and so is their application of these skills in real life. The present study aims to find out if attitude of the senior secondary school students towards the soft skills is correlated to the application of these skills in the real life.*

**Key words :** *Soft Skills, Communication skills, Problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, attitude, application*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Soft skills are the skills that are interpersonal skills that aid social skills of a person and are a part of the personality, attitudes, professional attributes which enable people to harness the environment and help them to collaborate with others to perform well. Soft skills compliment the hard skills and act as a catalyst in the path to achieve their goals and target success. The list of soft skills comprise skills such as communication skills, problem solving, critical thinking, leadership, team work, collaboration, lifelong learning, trouble shooting and many more.

## II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Soft skills are a set of productive personality traits that characterize a person's relationship in the environment. These skills can include social etiquette, communication skills, language skills, personal habits, cognitive or emotional resonance, time management, teamwork and leadership traits. The soft skills are interpreted as a general term for the skills under the three key functional elements based on the definition of the review literature: personnel skills, social skills, and personal career attributes. The National Business Education Association believes that soft skills are critical to staying diligent in today's workplace. Soft skills complement skills, which are hard skills, for productive workplace performance and daily living skills (Arkansas Department of Education, 2007).

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Hard skills are skills necessary for professional employment and can often be quantified and measured from educational backgrounds work experience or interviews unlike the soft skills which in a way a part of one's personality.

In the 20th century, soft skills were a major distinguishing factor and a necessary condition for employability and life success. A study conducted by Harvard University pointed out that 80% of professional achievement depends on soft skills, and only 20% depends on hard skills. Experts say that soft skills training should be effective at the beginning of the student's academic environment and future workplace. A public interest study conducted by McDonald's in the UK predicts that more than 500,000 people will be prevented from the employment sector by 2020 due to lack of soft skills.

Soft skills stand at a position of utmost importance as they are recognized as 21st century skills. Infact, the 4 Cs i.e. Communication, Collaboration, Critical thinking and creativity are also an integral part of soft skills.

## III. NEED OF THE STUDY

'Soft skills play an important role in a person's life success, especially in a person's career. They help to stand out in the workplace, and their importance cannot be ignored in this age of information and knowledge. The increasing global competition and the different nature of most technical professions make soft skills more than a prerequisite. For employers, technical professionals must not only master their technical disciplines, but also fully participate in the mission of the organization.' (Kumar Padhi, 2014)

The draft of National Education Policy (2019) clearly understands the need of these skills as it mentions that entire school education curriculum needs to be revamped to 'develop holistic learners' and it has placed a lot of importance to the higher order skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, logical reasoning, teamwork, social responsibility, multilingualism etc.

If we look at the industrial and employment markets, the demand for skilled workers is now growing. India is a relatively young country with an annual increase of about 28 million young people. More than 50% of the population is under 25 years of age, and more than 65% of the population is under 35 years of age. By 2020, the average age in India is expected to be 29 years old, while the average age in China is 37 years old and 48 years old in Japan. This clearly shows that if young people in this country are skilled in terms of both hard and soft skills, and ready to enter the industrial world, then everyone will have sufficient employment opportunities, which will lead to the growth of this country.

## Harness Soft Skills to Everyday Life: A Scientific Technique to Gain Success

Considering the ever rising need of skilled people, even before high school graduation, the training for young students is essential as:

- There appears to be a huge gap between employers' expectations of employees' skills in their field and the training they receive during their education and their qualifications.

- The introduction of skills training in youth will give students the opportunity to explore various options in various ways, thus narrowing down his/her favorite careers,

- Introducing skills training at a young age will largely guide students who are not academically or physically able to gain opportunities and thereby increase the country's workforce

- In addition to this, if students can exhibit some of these soft skills well it will also help them to adapt to the actual work situation without much effort. It will simplify the transition from a student to a professional

Therefore, soft skills must be taught to everyone at an early stage so that young people can succeed when they reach out to make a living.

### IV. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Soft Skills : A Study of Students' Attitude and its Application in Real Life Context Among Senior Secondary School

### V. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the difference in the attitude of male and female senior secondary school students towards soft skills.
2. To find out the difference in the application of soft skills in real life among male and female senior secondary school students.
3. To find out the relationship between attitude towards soft skills and application of soft skills in real life.

### VI. METHODOLOGY

For this study, out of the various soft skills, only three soft skills were considered namely: Communication Skills, Problem Solving Skills and Critical Thinking Skills. Self-developed tools were used which were standardised with the help of experts of five different universities before collection of actual raw data:

The tools employed were:

**i. Attitude Scale for Assessment of Soft Skills in School Students (ASASS)** – A three segment, five point likert scale was used as a tool in the present study to assess the attitude of the senior secondary school students towards soft skills. Half the items of the scale were to test the negative attitude and the other half to check the positive attitude of the students.

A preliminary draft of attitude scale consisting of 36 items was prepared first which comprises 12 statements related to attitude towards communication skills; 12 statements related to attitude towards problem solving skills and 12 statements related to attitude towards critical thinking. The preliminary draft of the attitude scale was then given to experts working in the respective field from 5 different universities for review. As per the recommendations of the experts in the field, 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 30 statements. Therefore, the content validity of the attitude scale was found.

The attitude scale was then given to 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' responds were same. No such item was found. Then, based on the scoring bar score of each item were checked and allotted to 28 individual students. The reliability of the tool was measured through Cronbach alpha reliability. For each respondent, scoring was done separately for positive items and negative items. Then the positive items were correlated with each other separately for communication 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 was found to be very reliable and was used for data collection in this study.

**ii. Soft Skills Test for Students (SSTS)**- A three segment proficiency test was used as a tool in the present study to assess the application of soft skills in their real life among senior secondary school students.

A preliminary draft of questionnaire consisting of 30 questions with multiple choice answers was prepared first. The draft questionnaire was then given to experts working in the respective field for review. As per the recommendations of the experts in the field, 3 statements were discarded. Some of the questions related to applicability of soft skills as well as the demographic questions were re-framed as per the comments of the experts. Thus, the final proficiency test consisted of 27 items. Item no. 1.1-1.11 comprises of multiple-choice questions related to application of communication skills. Item no. 2.1-2.8 comprises of multiple-choice questions related to application of critical thinking skills. Item no. 3.1-3.8 comprises of multiple-choice questions related to application of problem-solving skills. In this manner, the content validity of the Proficiency test was established.

The Proficiency test was first (test) administered to a group of 19 students who were not a part of the selected sample for a pilot study. The Proficiency test was again (re-test) administered to the same group after a period of 15 days to test the reliability of the tool. The responses collected through the test-retest of the Proficiency scale were then compared. The responses collected through the administration of the Proficiency test twice ranged between 0.7-0.8 which means acceptable reliability and thus the tool was found to be reliable for the study.

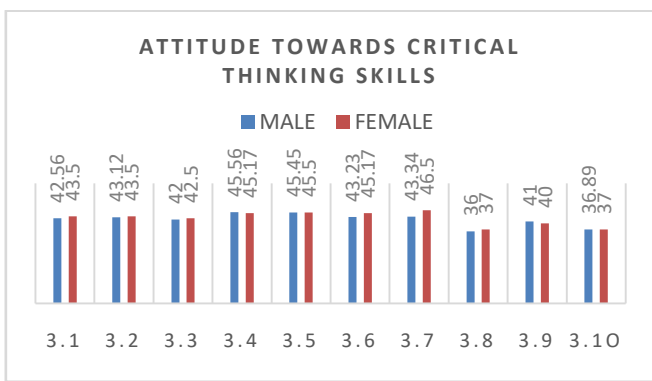
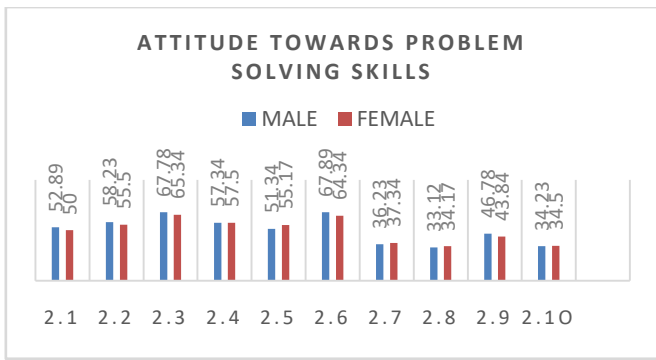
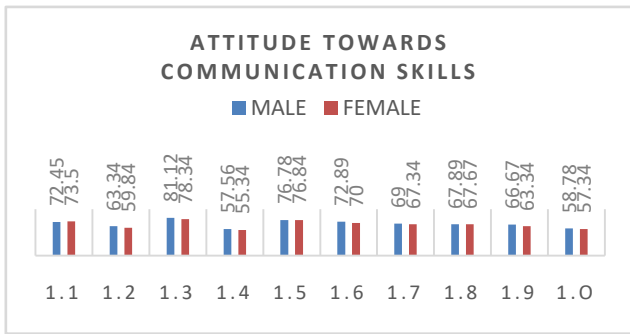
### VII. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

In the present study all the senior secondary students of New Delhi was considered as population. The data was collected in government and private senior secondary schools of NEW DELHI. Purposive sampling method was used to select the South west B zone of Delhi. The schools were then divided into two strata viz. Government and private.

Stratified random sampling was done to select 3 government and 3 private senior secondary schools i.e a total of 6 senior secondary schools were selected. Random sampling method was followed to select 300 students i.e 150 government school senior secondary school students and 150 private school senior secondary school students.

**VIII. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Graphical representation of the findings of the attitude of the Male and Female senior secondary school students towards communication skills, problem solving skills and critical thinking skills using ASASS

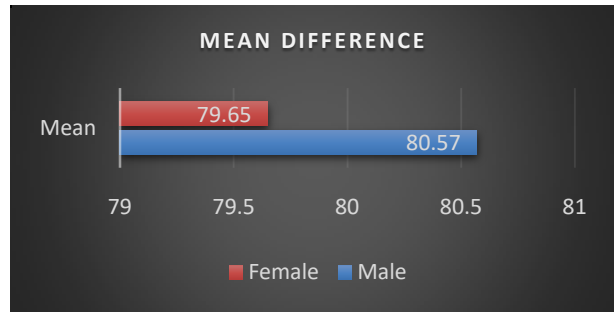


**Table 1: Showing significant difference in the attitude of male and female senior secondary school students towards soft skills**

Groups (VARIABLES)	Sample	Mean	t-value
Male	180	80.57	0.58
Female	120	79.65	

\*Not significant .05level

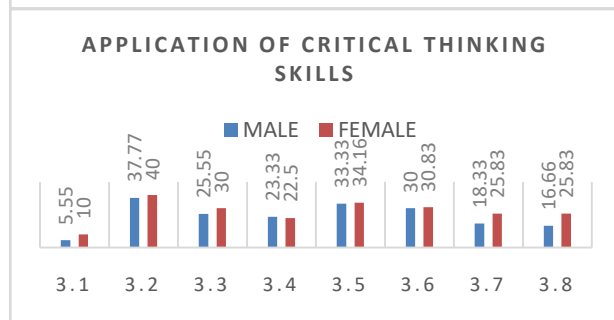
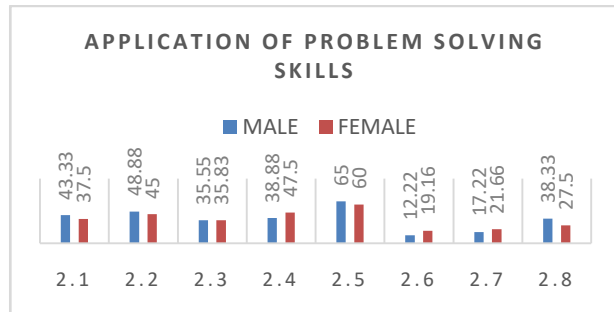
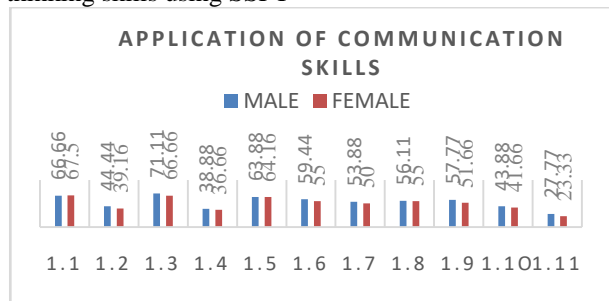
FIG. BAR diagram showing the mean difference in the attitude of male and female senior secondary school students towards Soft Skills



-it was found that the mean of male students was 80.57 which is higher than the mean of female students that is 79.65. The t-value is 0.58. and the p-value is .2784 which is below 0.05significant level.

This indicates that the male senior secondary students have higher or positive attitude towards soft skills than female senior secondary students.

Graphical representation of the findings of the Male and Female senior secondary school students' application of communication skills, problem solving skills and critical thinking skills using SSPT



Analysis of the data revealed that a significant difference does exist in the male and female senior secondary school students towards application of soft skills (at 0.5 significant level).

## Harness Soft Skills to Everyday Life: A Scientific Technique to Gain Success

**Table 2: Showing significant difference in the applicability of male and female senior secondary school students towards soft skills**

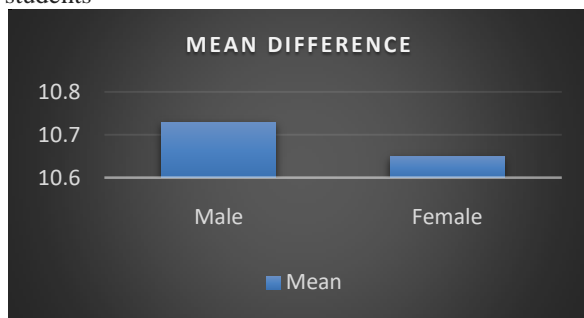
Groups (VARIABLES)	Sample	Mean	t-value
Male	180	10.73	0.1576
Female	120	<b>10.65</b>	

\*Not significant .05level

- It was found mean of scores obtained by male students is higher i.e. 10.73 than the mean of scores obtained by female students which is **10.65**. The t-value is 0.1576 and the p-value is .4374 which is below 0.05 significant level.

Thus, it can be stated that a significant difference does exist in the male and female senior secondary school students towards application of soft skills. It can be concluded that the male senior secondary school students are better able to apply soft skills in real life.

FIG. BAR diagram showing difference in the application of soft skills in male and female senior secondary school students



The mean of male students is 10.73 and the mean of female students is 10.65. This shows that the male senior secondary students have higher applicability of soft skills in real life than their female counterparts. This is because higher (positive) the attitude, better will be the applicability. In the findings mentioned before, it was observed that the attitude of males towards soft skills is higher, so it is obvious that the male students are able to apply soft skills better.

Relationship between attitude and application of Soft Skills based on three dimensions of soft skills: communicative skills, problem solving skills and critical thinking skills.

Table 3: Showing significant relationship between attitude and applicability of soft skills based on three dimensions of soft skills: communicative skills, problem solving skills and critical thinking skills.

ASA SS Item No.s	SST S Item No.s	Dimension SOFT SKILL	Variable-1 Attitude Mean N=300	Variable-2 Applicability Mean N=300	r-value
1.1-1.10	1.1-1.11	Communication	34	5.71	0.822
2.1-2.10	2.1-2.8	Problem solving	25.12	2.973	0.8162
3.1-3.10	3.1-3.8	Critical thinking	21.09	1.896	0.3169

\*Significant at .05 level

Analysis of Table5 shows that

- the mean of attitude towards Communication skills which is 34, is higher than Problem solving skills which is 25.12. The mean of attitude towards Problem solving skills which is 25.12, is higher than Critical thinking skills which is 21.0. The mean of applicability towards Communication skills which is 5.71, is higher than Problem solving skills which is 2.973. The mean of applicability towards Problem solving skills which is 2.973 is higher than Critical thinking skills which is 1.896

- it was found that the Communication skills r-value is 0.822. This shows that there is a strong positive correlation i.e the high attitude variable scores go with high applicability variable scores and vice versa. The Problem solving skills r-value is 0.8162. This shows that there is a strong positive correlation i.e the high attitude variable scores go with high applicability variable scores and vice versa. The Critical thinking skills r-value is 0.3169. This shows that there is a positive correlation though the relationship between attitude and applicability is weak.

It can be concluded that the attitude towards communication skills among senior students are high and their applicability is also high as compared to problem solving skills and critical thinking skills.

The educational institutions, teachers and parents should come together to inculcate a strong positive attitude towards the soft skills only then the application of soft skills in real life will improve. This can be done by integrating, inculcating and implementing soft skills in the school curriculum.

### IX. EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

This study will help the teachers to understand the attitude of the students towards the acquisition of soft skills in the school life. It will also enable them to understand the need and allow them to ensure that the students are able to effectively apply them in day to day life. It will also help in the clear understanding of the sub skills that need to be enhanced in every student according to their needs. Since, 'one size fits all' is no longer applicable in the teaching learning set up, the teachers can identify the weak areas of the learners and work in the direction to improve the same. Not only this, the real outcome would be that the students will be able to get better employment opportunities and would be able to succeed in a better way.

### X. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- Similar study may be done on a large sample i.e more than 300 samples.
- Similar study can also be conducted on learners of other Institutions, area or locality.
- A comparative study may also be carried out among secondary school students.
- A comparative study may also be carried out in Secondary School Institutions and also in the institutes providing higher education
- A comparative study may also be carried out on other dimensions or sub skills of soft skills.

- Study may also be carried out to find the relationship between soft skills and academic achievements.

## XI. CONCLUSION

In view of the findings of the study, it becomes clear that the positive attitude of the students towards the acquisition of soft skills leads to better application of these skills in real life. Though there exists a significant difference in the attitude of male students and female students of senior secondary school, it is not difficult to enhance and improve the situation provided the need is understood by all. It is important for not only the policy makers but also for the teachers and parents to understand the importance of these skills so that it is integrated in the formal curriculum and also in informal teaching learning environment.

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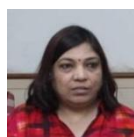
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