

# THE STUDY OF THE SCIENCE OF SOFT SKILLS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE LIVES OF UNDER GRADUATE STUDENTS IN MUMBAI

**Ms. Heta Parekh**

BMS Coordinator & Assistant Professor, L.S. Raheja College of Arts and Commerce  
heta.parekh@lsraheja.org

## ABSTRACT

Employability, the quality of being suitable for paid work, is the newly coined word for organisations and colleges today. This means that when a student graduates it is presumed that the theoretical knowledge is there however it does not necessarily mean that the student is Employable.

Soft skills like Communication, Motivation, Teamwork, Leadership, etc. help bridge the gap in order to achieve success. It is these skills which will complement the theoretical and technical training that they are already receiving. A couple of decades ago it did not matter whether a graduating student could communicate well or not. The lack of soft skills in the current candidates has resulted in low hiring and promotions by corporates in India.

Despite of this knowledge, many colleges are reluctant to incorporate soft skills training on a more regular and formal basis for their students. Although the theory component of their syllabi covers parts of communication and teamwork there is a dearth of formalised Soft Skills Training for the students.

In this paper the researcher has tried to address the science of Soft skills and the positive impact of soft skills training on the lives of students. An educator has the opportunity to train the student in soft skills only during their lifespan in college.

By identifying the areas of soft skills which a student has trained in, my study attempts to understand its importance on a deeper level. It also identifies the role of a teacher in imparting Soft skills training through various co-curricular activities.

The researcher evaluates the deficit in various soft skills by collecting primary data from corporates, teachers and students.

**Keywords** – Soft skills, employability, Under Graduate students, training.

## INTRODUCTION

Peggy Klaus once said, “Soft Skills get a little respect, but will make or break your career”.

Soft skills are skills that are related to interpersonal abilities of a person. Hard skills like accounting and designing a software can be counted and accounted for, Soft skills cannot be seen or touched but definitely felt. There was a time when hard skills in an employee were enough for him/her/them to succeed. However with growing competition and the continuous requirement of client and customer interaction, the importance of soft skills has grown to a large extent.

Organizations all over the world are focusing on the importance of building soft skills amongst their employees. As the world turns into a global village where the internet and the social media form a huge part of customer and client interaction there organizations feel the need to train their employees on various soft skills.

Many studies have shown that the component of soft skills is an essential variable in today’s workplace.<sup>[1-4]</sup> Soft skills are the employees Unique Selling Point which will give them an edge over the others. Some examples of the soft skills are –

✓ Communication Skills

- ✓ Leadership skills
- ✓ Team work
- ✓ Motivation
- ✓ Critical Thinking
- ✓ Time Management
- ✓ Positive Attitude
- ✓ Conflict management

According to Costin (2002), the appropriate and skillful application of hard skills is soft skills dependent. He categorizes hard skills as those being associated to 'product', while soft skills are those of 'processes and community'.

Considering the importance of the component of soft skills in today's workplace the responsibility of producing graduates with soft skills training has shifted to the educators of these graduates. The science of soft skills cannot be integrated into daily activities in educational institutions. An effort needs to be made on the part of educational institutions in order to introduce soft skills in the lives of the students on a more regular and consistent basis.

Hard skills are inculcated through academics and there are multiple subjects that students learn for the effective learning of hard skills, however educators will have to identify methods of developing soft skills that can provide the required competitive edge to the graduating students and prepare them for the corporate culture.

A study by Hodges and Burchell <sup>[5]</sup> investigated the perceptions of business employers of the importance of different skills. It was reported that 8 out of 10 skills were soft skills which included the willingness to learn, teamwork and cooperation, interpersonal communication, energy, passion and problem – solving skills. A study covering over 52 different professions with more than 8,000 managers in the United States identified soft skills of employees as the major competency in nearly all professions, even in the technical environments. <sup>[6]</sup>

While the importance of soft skills is established through various studies and surveys it is essential for the students to also understand the need and become aware of the changes in the environment. Porter <sup>[7]</sup> reported that many business management students do not put much value into developing soft skills. Due to this there is an awareness gap resulting in the deficiency of soft skills amongst the graduate students entering the corporate world.

The soft skills abilities of management students have to be strong in order to be prepared to face the challenges of managing teams and working in stressful environments. It is not easy to integrate the learnings of soft skills in the education system where hard skills are given almost 80% weightage. However the responsibility for this falls on the educator's shoulders as it this through the education system that a BMS student is expecting employment.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are –

- To understand the awareness of the impact of soft skills on their employability amongst students.
- To identify types of courses / programmes which offer soft skills development as their objective.
- To understand the impact of soft skills on the employability of the students from the corporate point of view.
- To understand the awareness of the impact of soft skills on students amongst the teaching fraternity.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Rosalie Flynn (2006) in his discussion paper prepared for Australian Industry Group and the Business, Industry and Higher Education Collaboration Council discusses the skills needed by graduates for better employment. He talks about how these skills are described and assessed in the universities of Australia.<sup>[8]</sup>

Chadha & Nicholas (2005) discussed the approaches taken for soft skills development in undergraduate engineering students.<sup>[9]</sup>

Paul Benkeser and Wendy Newsletter (2004) discuss an approach of developing soft skills via problem based learning experiences. They have suggested that these experiences must be collaborated in the curriculum of the students so that the learnings can be fully integrated. The development of these skills can then be evaluated in different academic settings.<sup>[10]</sup>

Hangman and Almekinders et.al. (2003), suggested that soft skills must be integrated into the existing courses and must be taught in academic settings designed to encourage participation.<sup>[11]</sup>

Clayton et.al. (2003) in their research study investigate the nature of generic skills. Embedding of these skills in training packages and accredited courses, assessment and certification of these skills and the implications of the increased emphasis of these generic skills on Australian VET system have also been emphasized by them.<sup>[12]</sup>

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Due to the lack of time the sample size and respondents of the survey have mainly been students, teachers and corporates working in the Metro city of Mumbai.

### METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study comprised descriptive research design and accordingly a survey was conducted. The initial study was first sourced from a review of literature relating to the impact of different soft skills. For this purpose various papers, E-books and journals were studied.

The major source of information was the primary research that was conducted using a structured, comprehensive and undisguised questionnaire. The data was collected from various colleges which conduct courses on soft skills. The collected data was edited, coded and tabulated. The tabulated data was analysed and inferences drawn to intercept the meaning. Simple statistical tools like percentages, averages etc. were used for analysis of data.

### SAMPLE POPULATION

The target population of the survey comprised 102 Bachelor of Management Studies students, 5 teachers involved in developing soft skills amongst students and 10 professionals from the Media industry.

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### Demographics –

Figure 1.1 -

Class -  
101 responses

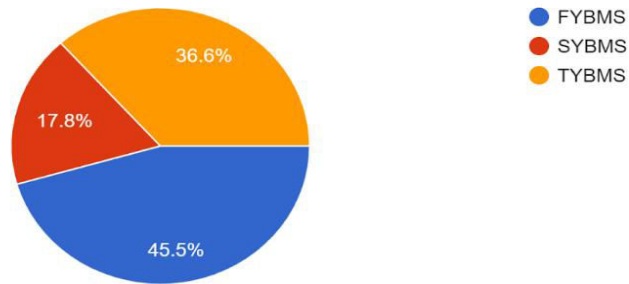


Figure 1.1 denotes the classes the BMS students belong to.

**Figure 1.2**

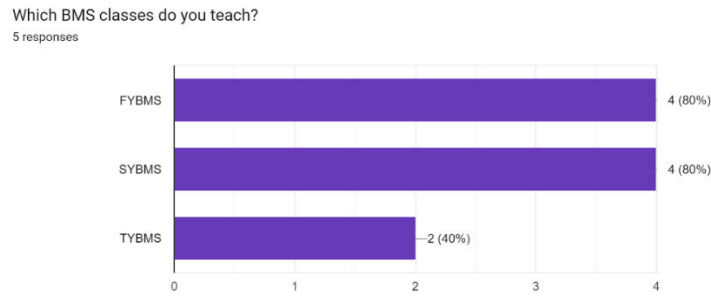


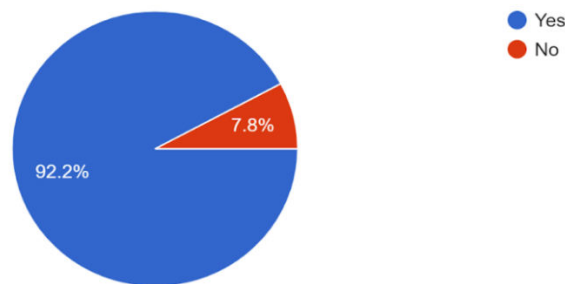
Figure 1.2 denotes the classes taught by the teacher respondents of the survey.

**Excerpts of the Survey conducted for Students –**

**Figure 2.1**

Do you have subjects related to Soft skills in your study program? (soft skills like communication, teamwork, etc)

102 responses

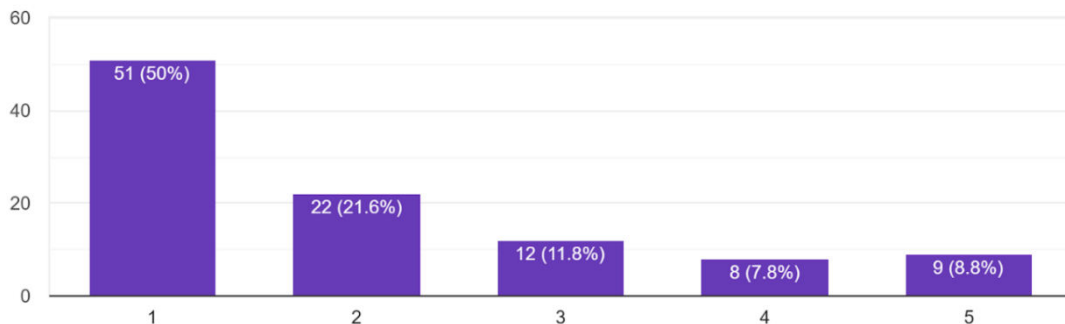


- Out of a 102 respondents a maximum number of BMS students were aware that they have courses related to soft skills in their study program.

**Figure 2.2**

According to you, does the training in Soft Skills make you employable?

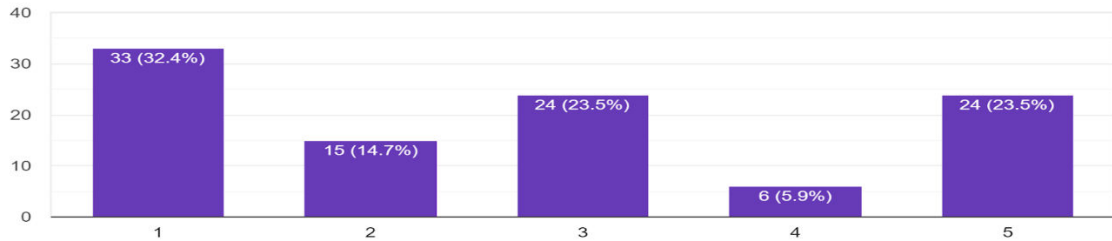
102 responses



- Where 1 stood for Strongly Agree and 5 for Strongly Disagree, more than 50% of students felt that Soft skills training makes them employable.

**Figure 2.3**

Do you think that the training in soft skills will help you in social situations?  
102 responses

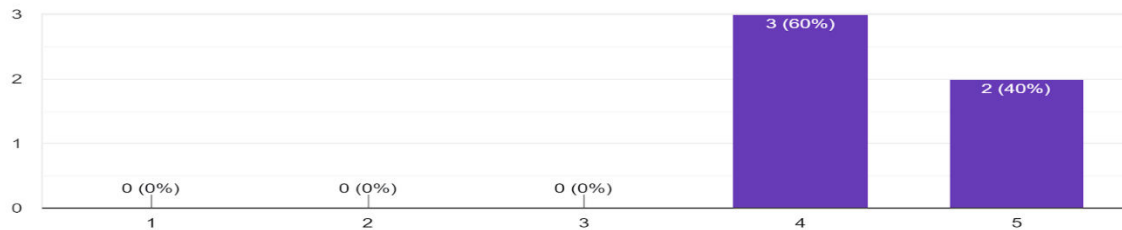


- Where 1 stood for Strongly Agree and 5 for Strongly Disagree, there were varied answers as to whether soft skills would help the students in social situations. However a high percentage of students strongly agreed that a training in soft skills would help them in social situations.

**Excerpts of the Survey conducted for Teachers –**

**Figure 3.1**

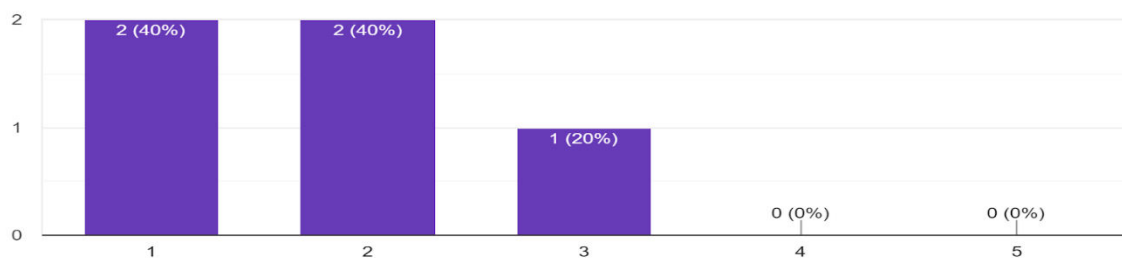
In the current employment scenario do you think that only 1 subject covering Soft Skills is enough?  
5 responses



- 5 being the highest and 1 being the lowest, all the teachers feel that only 1 subject covering soft skills is not enough.

**Figure 3.2**

According to you, does the training in Soft Skills make the undergraduate students employable?  
5 responses

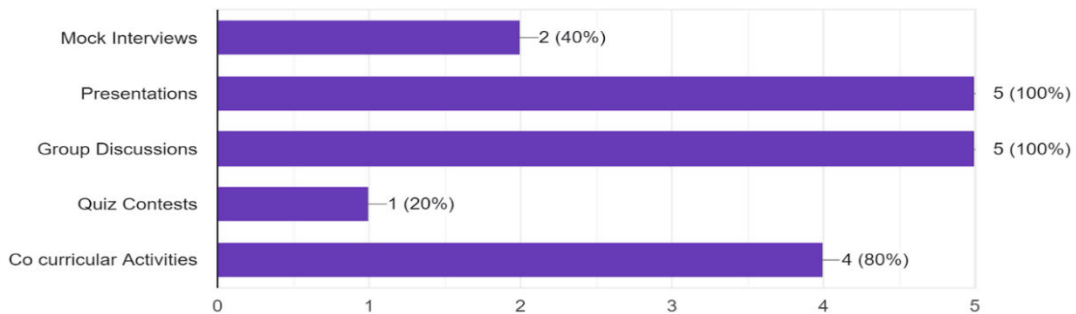


- 1 being Strongly Agree most teachers felt that a training in soft skills will make the students employable.

**Figure 3.3**

How do you evaluate the students on their knowledge of the Soft Skills?

5 responses

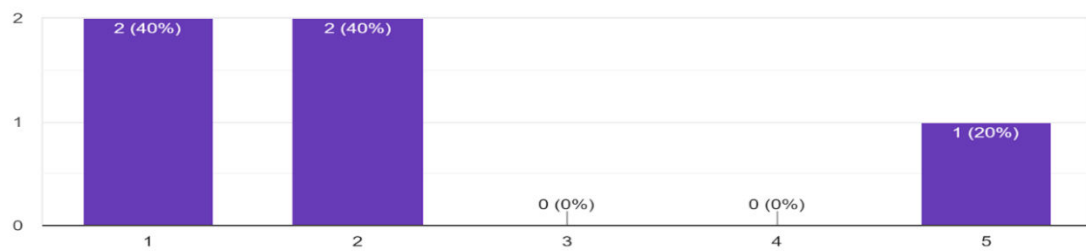


- As denoted by the figure above it is noted that Presentations and Group Discussions are the most popular ways to evaluate the students of their knowledge on soft skills.

**Figure 3.4**

Do you think that the training in soft skills will help the students in their Social and Personal lives as well?

5 responses



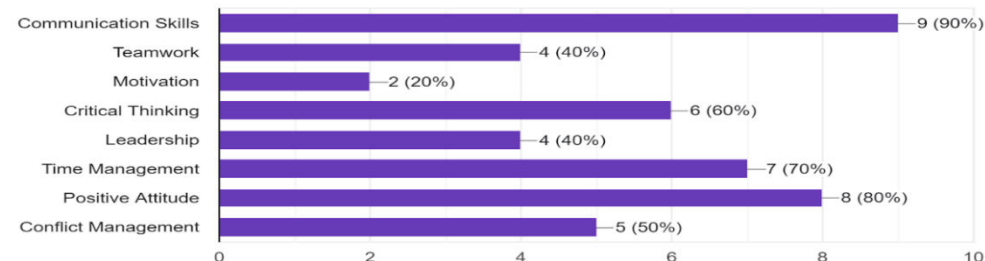
- 1 being Strongly Agree most teachers felt that a training in soft skills will definitely help the students in their social and personal situations as well.

**Excerpts of the Survey conducted for Corporates –**

**Figure 4.1**

According to you which Soft Skills makes an undergraduate student "employable"?

10 responses

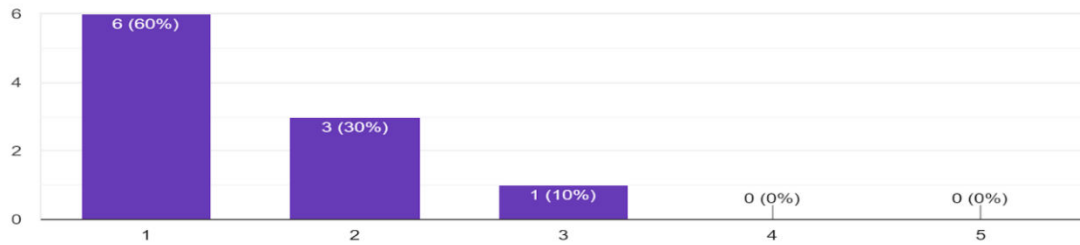


- The responses suggest that all the soft skills hold relevance for an undergraduate student to become employable; however the highest ranking is Communication skills.

**Figure 4.2**

In the current employment scenario do you think that the emphasis on Soft Skill education & training should increase?

10 responses

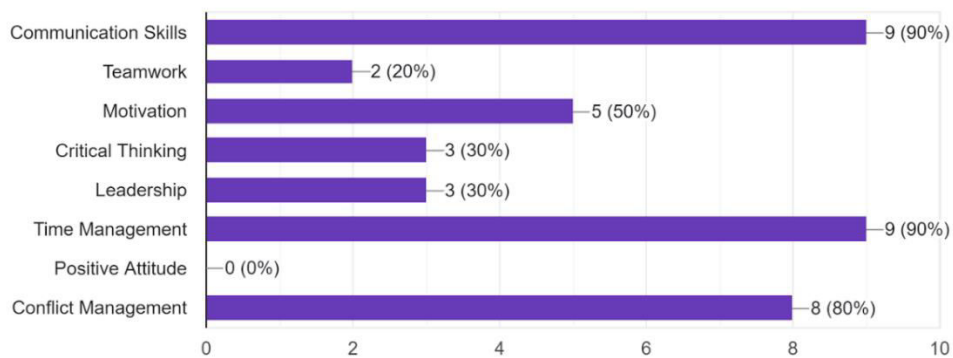


- 1 being Strongly Agree most corporate respondents felt that there should be an increase in the emphasis of soft skills training and education.

**Figure 4.3**

Which Soft Skill does your industry provide training for -

10 responses

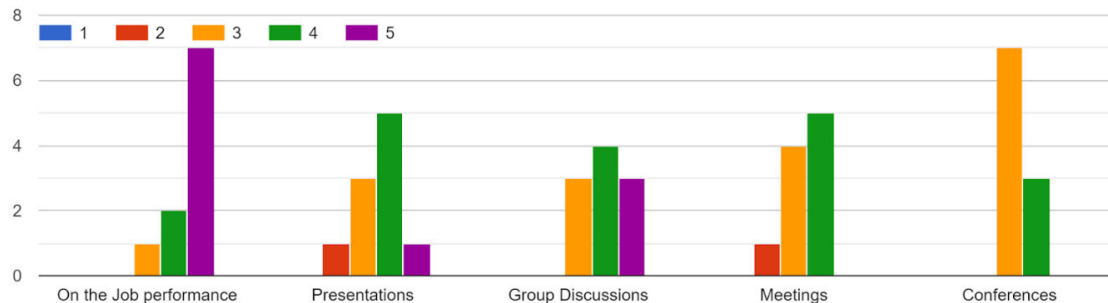


- Once again, even though all the other soft skills are important, the Media Industry puts the highest emphasis on Communication Skills.

**Figure 4.4**



How do you evaluate the hired students on their knowledge of the Soft Skills? (1 being the least important and 5 being the most important)



- When asked how they evaluate the hired under graduate students on their knowledge of soft skills, the corporate respondents have picked Meetings as the most popular method. While other methods like On the Job performance, Presentations and Group discussions also hold importance.

## FINDINGS

The main findings of the study are presented below –

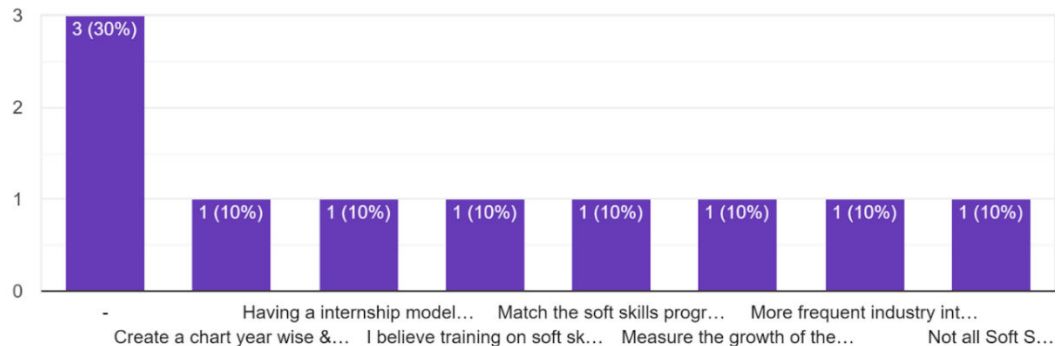
- Although student respondents felt differently about individual soft skills, most respondents felt that it was essential for them to inculcate more soft skills in order to become employable. They were of the belief that not only will the soft skills help them in building a better career but also help them in social and personal situations. They felt that the quality of their life can vastly improve with an enhanced knowledge of soft skills.
- While hard skills are important in today's technologically driven world, the respondents felt that including more subjects related to soft skills could prepare them better for the world outside of education. When asked the open ended question as to which soft skills would they like to be trained on; their responses included Communication skills, Personality Development, Team work, Leadership, etc. A majority of them also felt that they should be trained on Stress Management since the competitive industry environment has led to more and more anxiety related issues.
- Most of the teachers felt that although Communication skills are the highest ranking skills in the minds of the students and corporates; a holistic approach to soft skills development is needed. The teachers felt that the learnings of soft skills is a lifelong process but they also felt that the best time to inculcate them would be while the students are at the undergraduate level.
- Corporate experts were of the opinion that when an undergraduate student has finished their course/ program, the industry presumes that soft skills are integrated and embedded in them as well.

## SUGGESTIONS:

Figure 5.1

Do provide your suggestions to the education system on Imparting more Soft skills training to their undergraduate students -

10 responses



- Developing soft skills should be the goal of all educational institutions in today's global scenario. The integration of soft skills courses should be done with the hard skills courses. For this to happen the educational institutions have to interweave the soft skills into the academic courses by designing courses which focus on both.
- The faculty and educators should continuously incorporate processes and practices of the industry into the curriculum so as to ensure holistic learning for the students. The curriculum and the evaluation and assessment of these soft skills should be known to the students well in advance so as to encourage more participation.
- The courses should be designed in a way that they become a bridge between theory and practical for the students. The final goal of each of them being the employability of the students and their preparation for the competitive world outside of the educational institutions.

## CONCLUSION

In today's day and age where there are thousands of Bachelor of Management Studies graduates passing out on a yearly basis, each graduate has to focus on becoming more and more employable. To ensure that this happens undergraduate students are always looking for additional courses, internships to add to their resume. However, the courses and the skills that these courses focus on are majorly hard skills.

Where the earlier focus was on hard skills and an employee's competency was judged only on the basis of how they performed on these skills. According to the survey conducted, although most students were aware about the importance of soft skills they felt that the academic courses offered to them by the educational institutions lacked focus on these skills.

Education is the backbone of the development of the youth of the country and industry experts feel that the emphasis on soft skills by the educators will ensure employability for the graduating students. Along with courses and programs based on soft skills, educational institutions should also introduce appropriate methods of assessment and evaluation of the skills.

Institutions should look at training their teachers for these soft skills courses so that they will be better equipped to educate the students for the same. Education and the industry have to collaborate with each other in order to ensure higher employability in the graduates.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Loughry, M. L., Ohland, M. W., & Woehr, D. J. (2014). Assessing teamwork skills for assurance of learning using CATME team tools. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 36(1), 5-19.

- [2] Ngang, T. K., & Chan, T. C. (2015). Critical issues of soft skills development in teaching professional training: Educators' perspectives. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 205, 128-133.
- [3] O'Neill, T. A., Hoffart, G. C., McLarnon, M. M., Woodley, H. J., Eggermont, M., Rosehart, W., & Brennan, R. (2017). Constructive controversy and reflexivity training promotes effective conflict profiles and team functioning in student learning teams. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 16(2), 257-276.
- [4] Donia, M. B., O'Neill, T. A., & Brutus, S. (2018). The longitudinal effects of peer feedback in the development and transfer of student teamwork skills. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 61, 87-98.
- [5] Hodges, D., & Burchell, N. (2003). Business graduate competencies: Employers' views on importance and performance. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*, 4(2), 16.
- [6] Rubin, R. S., & Dierdorff, E. C. (2009). How relevant is the MBA? Assessing the alignment of required curricula and required managerial competencies. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 8(2), 208-224.
- [7] Porter, J. (2007). B-Schools Soft on 'Soft Skills'. *BusinessWeek Online*, 2-2.
- [8] Flynn, R. (2006). Graduate Employability Skills: Discussion Paper. Precision Consultancy, Melbourne, Australia.
- [9] Chadha, D., & Nicholls, G. (2006). Teaching transferable skills to undergraduate engineering students: Recognising the value of embedded and bolt-on approaches. *International Journal of Engineering Education*, 22(1), 116.
- [10] Benkeser, P., & Newstetter, W. (2004, June). Integrating soft skills in a BME curriculum. In 2004 Annual Conference (pp. 9-770).
- [11] Hagmann, J., Almekinders, C. J. M., Bukenya, C., Guevara, F., & Halemichael, A. (2003). Developing 'soft skills' in higher education. *PLA notes*, 48, 21-25.
- [12] Clayton, B., Blom, K., Meyers, D., & Bateman, A. (2003). Assessing and certifying generic skills. *National Centre for Vocational Education Research*, 252.
- [13] Wats, M., & Wats, R. K. (2009). Developing soft skills in students. *International Journal of Learning*, 15(12).

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY –**

1. McLean, S. (2010). *Business communication for success*. Boston, MA: Flat World Knowledge.
2. Perini, S., Luglietti, R., Margoudi, M., Oliveira, M., & Taisch, M. (2017). Training advanced skills for sustainable manufacturing: A digital serious game. *Procedia Manufacturing*, 11, 1536-1543.