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DEVELOPING SOFT SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION.

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Abstract. *The article explores the importance of developing soft skills in higher education institutions and their role in preparing students for professional and personal goals. While traditional education systems have primarily focused on theoretical knowledge, there is a growing need to equip students with crucial soft skills such as problem-solving, leadership, critical thinking, and teamwork. These skills are important for improving employability and enabling individuals to effectively adapt to real-world challenges. The article examines the main challenges faced by higher education institutions, including the overemphasis on theoretical instruction, lack of practical activities, large class sizes, and limited teacher training. As a result, many graduates lack the necessary competencies required in modern workplaces.*

Keywords: *Critical thinking, employability, real-world challenges, traditional education, technical qualification, professionalism.*

Introduction

With the altering educational tendencies, flexibility in educational of masses of qualified personnel, the competition for job acquisition and job sustainability is becoming more and more challenging. For today's labor market where workplaces are resizing and decreasing positions it has been evident that professional skills alone are not sufficient to keep individuals employed. In order to get an advantage over the competitors, applicants are left with no choice but to add merits to their hard skills. As Klaus P. asserts the lack of soft skills can sink the promising career of someone who has professional expertise but no interpersonal qualities (Klaus P. 2010).

What are Soft Skills?

Soft skills are a set of personal and interpersonal abilities that determine how individuals communicate interact, and work with others in different situations. Unlike technical or "hard" skills, which are job-specific, soft skills are not tied to a particular profession and can be applied across various fields. The laws on Policy accentuate the organization of a complex system of learning and teaching foreign languages in the country, concentrated on the upbringing of harmoniously developed, educated and intellectual young generation of people, who can meet the requirements of the modern work labor. In order to achieve the aims and objectives introduced by the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On Education" (1997) and the "National Program of Personnel training" (1997) the compounded system of reorganizing





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the structure and the content of personnel training are being developed in the country, that are grounded on perspectives of the social, economic development of the society, contemporary achievements of science, culture, technique and technology. In simple terms, while hard skills show what a person knows, soft skills demonstrate how a person uses that knowledge in real-life situation (Karimova Nilufar. 2020).

Why are Soft Skills Important?

Soft skills are crucial in today's world because they enable individuals to effectively navigate both professional and personal environments. Without strong soft skills, even struggle to succeed in their careers and maintain productive relationship. One of the main reasons soft skills are essential is their direct impact on employability. Modern employers increasingly seek candidates who can communicate clearly, work collaboratively, and adapt to changing circumstances. In many cases, employers value soft skills as much as, or even more than, technical qualifications. This is because workplaces are dynamic and require employees to interact with colleagues, solve problems, and manage responsibilities efficiently. A person who lacks these abilities may find it difficult to perform effectively, regardless of their academic achievements. Moreover, soft skills play a crucial role in workplace success and career advancement. Skills such as leadership, teamwork and emotional intelligence help individuals build strong professional relationships and contribute positively to organizational goals. Employees who can manage conflicts, think critically, and make informed decisions are more likely to be promoted and trusted with greater responsibilities. Therefore, soft skills not only help individuals secure jobs but also enable them to grow within their careers. Furthermore, soft skills are vital for adapting to real-world challenges. In everyday life, people constantly face unexpected situations that require flexibility, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Soft skills allow individuals to remain calm under pressure, communicate effectively in difficult situations, and find practical solutions to complex problems. These abilities are especially important in a rapidly changing global environment where new challenges emerge regularly. Another important aspect of soft skills is their contribution to personal development. They help individuals build confidence, improve self-awareness, and develop better relationships with others. For example, strong communication skills can enhance social interactions, while good time management skills increase productivity and reduce stress. As a result, individuals with well-developed soft skills tend to lead more balanced and successful lives. Finally, soft skills are transferable, meaning they can be applied in any field or situation. Unlike technical skills, which may become outdated over time, soft skills remain relevant throughout a person's life. This makes them a valuable long-term asset for continuous learning and professional growth.

Developing Soft Skills in Higher Education Classrooms

In higher education, soft skills such as integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, professionalism, flexibility, and teamwork play a crucial role in preparing students for future careers. These skills can be effectively developed through structured academic activities.





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Integrity can be fostered through group projects where each student is assigned specific responsibilities and is required to reflect on their individual contribution.

This encourages honesty and accountability.

Communication skills are enhanced through academic discussions, presentations, and writing tasks aimed at real or simulated audiences, enabling students to express ideas clearly and confidently.

Courtesy should be emphasized by promoting respectful interaction among students in both in-person and online learning environments.

Responsibility can be developed by encouraging students to justify missed deadlines and propose strategies for improvement rather than simply penalizing them.

Professionalism is cultivated by expecting students to meet academic standards such as punctuality, preparedness, and respect for others.

Flexibility is supported by allowing students some autonomy in completing long-term assignments within defined guidelines, helping them develop problem-solving and self-management skills.

Teamwork is strengthened through collaborative learning, where students practice cooperation, communication, and shared responsibility.

Challenges and Solutions in Enhancing Soft Skills Development

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of soft skills, many higher education institutions face significant challenges in effectively developing these competencies among students. One of the most prominent issues is the overemphasis on theoretical knowledge. In many universities, the primary focus remains on lectures, memorization, and examinations, which limits students' opportunities to engage in practical learning. As a result, students may excel academically but struggle to apply their knowledge in real-life situations. Another major challenge is the lack of practical activities within the curriculum. Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving require active practice and real-world interaction. However, many educational programs do not provide sufficient opportunities for group work, presentations, or project-based learning. According to various educational studies, a significant percentage of graduates report feeling unprepared for workplace communication and collaboration due to limited practical exposure during their studies. Large class sizes also present a barrier to effective soft skills development. When classrooms are overcrowded, it becomes difficult for instructors to engage students individually or organize interactive activities. In such environments, teaching often becomes one-sided, with students passively receiving information rather than actively participating in discussions or collaborative tasks. This reduces interpersonal skills. In addition, limited teacher training is another critical issue. Many educators are highly qualified in their subject areas but may lack the necessary skills or training to teach and assess soft skills. Traditional teaching methods are often insufficient for fostering abilities such as critical thinking or emotional intelligence. Without proper guidance and support from trained instructors, students may not fully develop these competencies.





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To address these challenges, higher education institutions must adopt more effective and modern approaches to teaching and learning. One of the most important strategies is integrating soft skills development into the curriculum. Instead of treating these skills as optional, universities should embed them into academic courses through structured activities such as group projects, case studies, and presentations. This allows students to develop both theoretical knowledge and practical abilities simultaneously. Another key solution is the use of interactive teaching methods. Approaches such as problem-based learning, discussions, role-playing, and collaborative tasks encourage students to actively participate in the learning process. Research indicates that students engaged in interactive learning environments are significantly more likely to develop communication and critical thinking skills compared to those in traditional lecture-based settings. Furthermore, providing workshops and training programs can greatly enhance soft skills development. Specialized workshops on topics such as leadership, time management, and emotional intelligence can offer students additional opportunities to practice to practice and refine these skills. Internships and real-world experiences can also bridge the gap between academic learning and professional requirements. Importantly, institutions should invest in teacher training to ensure that educators are equipped with the necessary tools and techniques to support soft skills development. By improving teaching quality, universities can create a more effective and engaging learning environment.

Co-curriculum is essential in generating holistic graduates that are equipped physically, emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually. According to Selamat et al (2013), the eight principles of co-curriculum, include experiential learning, authentic, total learning experience, and soft skills. The implementation of co-curriculum is essential ensuring that students get to experience skills first-hand, which can be best ways to learn (Dr.K.Karuna Devi. August 2019).

Conclusion. In conclusion, the development of soft skills in higher education has become increasingly significant in today's complex and competitive world. While academic knowledge remains crucial, it is no longer sufficient on its own to ensure success in professional and personal life. Soft skills such as communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and adaptability play an essential role in enabling individuals to effectively apply their knowledge and navigate real-world challenges. Ultimately, higher education should aim to provide a holistic learning experience that goes beyond the transfer of knowledge.

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