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NEW VISION OF HIGHER EDUCATION: SOFT SKILLS AND ICT

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Abstract:

In this era of globalization, higher education has become a vital need of every sector. However, higher education is not sufficient to satisfy the need of industry and other sectors, may be private or public. Higher education necessarily shall comprise soft skills that will strengthen the knowledge acquired during higher education. Soft skills are a cluster of productive personality traits that characterize one's relationships in a milieu. These skills can include social graces, communication abilities, language skills, personal habits, cognitive or emotional empathy, time management, team-work and leadership traits.

Globalization has intensified the competition and knowledge alone would not be adequate to stand different and strong there. Higher education will elevate in the specialized category while soft skills will help in enhancing the same knowledge. Hence it is necessary to make soft skills as an integral part of higher education. A study conducted by Harvard University noted that 80% of achievements in career are determined by soft skills and only 20% by hard skills. Experts say soft skills training should begin for a person when they are students, to perform efficiently in their academic environment as well as in their future workplace.

Employability is another facet that is the most desired consequence of higher education especially in India. However, higher education alone may not meet requirements of employability in a long term run and soft skills assume importance in higher education and ultimately in employability.

Key words: *Employability, globalization,higher education,Soft skills.*

Introduction:

Globalization has intensified competition in every sphere of business and so also in educational services. Success of every enterprise by and large depends upon skilled man power. The world has come closer and now one is required to be multi-tasked in order to cope up in the competition. Higher education confers specialized knowledge to the students which is necessary to obtain an employment. However, as stated earlier, specialized knowledge is not sufficient in competition and one is required to learn certain other traits that would make him to keep pace ahead in the competition. These traits are known as soft skills.

What is the concept of soft skills?

Soft Skills is a very popular term nowadays, used to indicate personal transversal competences such as social aptitudes, language and communication capability, friendliness and ability of working in team and other personality traits that characterize relationships between people.

A first distinction can be made between self-oriented/ intrapsychic and other oriented/Interpersonal Skills. The self-oriented or intrapsychic skills are those that relate the person with self while other-oriented or interpersonal skills refer with those with which a person deals with others. Soft skills not only focus on intrapsychic skills but also interpersonal skills too. Unless a person knows how to deal with self, he would not be able to deal with others. Soft Skills also give hard skills the requiredplasticity to develop and keep up-to-date inchanging circumstances.

What are soft skills?

In January 2007 the career management consultant Challa Ram Phani published an article under the headline "The top 60 soft skills at work", listing and discussing those 60 skills which according to his study are "the personal traits and skills that employers state are the most important when selecting employees for jobs of any type" (Phani, 2007).Soft skills are a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character

of personality traits, attitudes, career attribute,social intelligence and emotional intelligence quotients among others that enable people to navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals with complementing hard skills.

Following is a "top ten" list of soft skills compiled by Eastern Kentucky University from executive listings.

1. Communication – oral speaking capability, written, presenting, listening, clear speech & writing. This further comprises-
    a. Ability to deliver idea clearly, effectively andwith confidence either orally or in writing.
    b. Ability to practice active listening skill andrespond.
    c. Ability to present clearly and confidently to theaudience.
2. Courtesy – manners, etiquette, business etiquette, gracious, says please and thank you, respectful.
3. Flexibility – adaptability, willing to change, lifelong learner, accepts new things, adjusts, teachable.
4. Integrity – honest, ethical, high morals, has personal values, does what's right.
5. Interpersonal skills – nice, personable, sense of humor, friendly, nurturing, empathetic, has self-control, patient, sociability, warmth, social skills.
6. Positive attitude – optimistic, enthusiastic, encouraging, happy, confident.
7. Professionalism – businesslike, well-dressed, appearance, poised.
8. Responsibility – accountable, reliable, gets the job done, resourceful, self-disciplined, wants to do well, conscientious, common sense.
9. Teamwork – cooperative, gets along with others, agreeable, supportive, helpful, collaborative.It also includes-
    a. Ability to build a good rapport, interact andwork effectively with others.
    b. Ability to understand and play the role of aleader and follower alternatively.
    c. Ability to recognize and respect other'sattitude, behavior and beliefs.
10. Work ethic – hard working, willing to work, loyal, initiative, self-motivated, on time, good attendance.

    However, the list is not exhaustive and the concept of soft skills encompasses in itself many more features and these change with time, place and person and one thing is very important that one must have the soft skills not only at the time of employment but during employment too.

These skills are also referred as 21st century skills and can be enlisted as below-

21st century content. Several significant, emerging content areas are critical to success in communities and workplaces.

Learning and thinking skills:As much as students need to learn academic content, they also need to know how to keep learning — and make effective and innovative use of what they know — throughout their lives. Learning and thinking skills comprise:

- Critical-thinking and problem-solving skills
- Communication skills
- Creativity and innovation skills
- Collaboration skills
- Contextual learning skills
- Information and media literacy skills

ICT literacy:Information and communications technology (ICT) literacy is the ability to use technology to develop 21st century content knowledge and skills, in the context of learning core subjects. Students must be

able to use technology to learn content and skills — so that they know *how* to learn, think critically, solve problems, use information, communicate, innovate and collaborate.

Life skills:Good teachers have always incorporated life skills into their pedagogy. The challenge today is to incorporate these essential skills into schools deliberately, strategically and broadly. Life skills include:

- Leadership
- Ethics
- Accountability
- Adaptability
- Personal productivity
- Personal responsibility
- People skills
- Self-direction
- Social responsibility

Higher education and soft skills:

Soft skills that complement subject-specific knowledge and skills are commonly demanded by employers of entry-level employees and are therefore an important factor in increasing students' employability. However, soft skills have yet to be adequately taught in schools and universities. This might be due to the fact that the term soft skill is ill-defined, especially in relation to the more widely used term 'competence'.

Soft skills education is not part of education till today. National Assessment and Accreditation (NAAC) now expects from higher education institutions to implement courses for students that will develop soft skills amongst students.

The National Policy on Education, as formulated in 1986 and modified in 1992, has been the guiding document of the policies of the Central Government in the education sector for well over two decades. During this period, significant changes have taken place in India and the world at large. New technologies have transformed the way in which we live, work, and communicate; the corpus of knowledge has vastly expanded and become multi-disciplinary; and research has become far more collaborative. Since the NPE was last reviewed in 1992, there have been momentous changes in the situation in India and worldwide. These need to be taken into account in formulating a new NPE for the coming decades.

Indian education system is based on National Education Policy, 1986 and new policy would be introduced in couple of months. Since the Education policy in existence is of 1986, it in in consonance with the circumstances and requirements of that era and hence needs to transformed drastically even though it was amended in 1992. The education system lacks many features that are requirements or necessities of education system of 21st century. These features comprise vocational education, vocational training, skill development, use of ICT, soft skills, etc. In this regard, it is necessary to make soft skills as an integral part of education and not just higher education while higher education emphasizing on specific soft skills relating to specialized higher education.

One may mention leadership, conflict resolution, negotiation, presentation skills and creativity are all essential for maximising human capital within an enterprise. It has been argued by employers that graduates are not equipped with the right set of „soft skills" that would enable them to integrate themselves and contribute effectively at the workplace (Constable &Touloumakos, 2009). Employers tend to see most new graduates as somewhat self-centred, unable to integrate within an existing team and expecting to be placed in a senior position without demonstrating the right qualities for leadership etc. (Schultz, 2008).

As stated earlier, since higher education itself lacks formal education or courses imparting education of soft skills, it is but obvious that students taking this higher education too lack soft skills.

Need of soft skills in higher education:

Globalization demands multi taskers i.e. persons who are able to perform not only the functions or tasks in which he received formal education but also those that are allied to it. If the students seeking employment are not capable to perform these multiple tasks, they cannot be considered to be employable.

The utility of higher education in assuring employment is questionable. Many graduate and post graduate students do not get jobs in their respective fields even after spending several years in acquiring higher education. While the problem of educated unemployed youth remains acute, there is also, paradoxically, a shortage of skilled manpower in the labour market. There a clear gap between the focus and quality of education in academia and the actual skills required by industry.

This observation in National Education Policy, 2016 also focused on lack of skills in education.

One aspect that can assist in promoting the quality of education is to improve the teaching and learning system. As such the higher education institution should be able to play the role of an information disseminator or human capital that are not only knowledgeable but also possess all the characteristics of a holistic individual.

Conclusion:

In this era of transformation and globalization, having formal education is not enough for employability and it must be coupled with abilities that would make the student having global competencies. The soft skills are necessary not just for obtaining employment but also during continuance of employment for successfully escalating it; soft skills are necessary for entrepreneurship too. Soft skill education shall become an integral part of education system. Teaching soft skills during higher education would certainly help the students in employment. In this regard soft skills shall be made part and parcel of higher education.