

Integrating Soft Skills in Teaching Learning Process in Bachelor of Education Programme

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to develop soft skills among the Bachelor of Education undergraduates through integration of soft skills into the teaching learning process. Undergraduates' satisfaction level on contribution from Bachelor of Education Curriculum for developing soft skills varied with 80% satisfaction in time management skills. Over 60% were very satisfied with contribution towards Teamwork, Work Ethics, Presentation skills, Interpersonal, Organizational, Listening skills and Motivation. Need for informal and formal soft skills development and training for teaching and other employment were highlighted. Teaching practice and school experience provide opportunities for supervising, developing, guiding, and evaluating soft skills. Enhanced acquiring of undergraduate soft skills was observed at end of Course. Conclusions include need for providing guidance and opportunities for soft skills development with a self-learning environment and student-centered learning reducing competition and examination mentality; undergraduates to integrate soft skills into lives developing a personality students can learn from.

Keywords: Higher education, Bachelor of Education, soft skills, Graduate attributes, Employability, university-industry cell, workforce

1. Introduction

The issue of unemployed graduates poses a great challenge in solving issues existing in the current world scenario. One of the major causes identified is the lack of soft skills among graduates. In this respect, some of the identified areas as lacking soft skills are critical thinking, communication, presentation, leadership, teamwork, interpersonal skills, management skills, time management and problem-solving skills. Therefore, there arises the necessity to find ways of developing soft skills in undergraduates to fulfill the needs of 21st century workforce.

It has been established that the Quality of University education is one of the major criteria considered for employment of graduates produced by a particular University. There seems to be a link between the issue of graduate unemployment and the quality of University education. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) of the University Grants Commission in Sri Lanka identified seven weak areas in universities with respect to skills development of undergraduates. To meet the skills demand in employment, the Universities and Higher Education Institutions (HIEs) need to focus on developing the skills that are in demand by employers for graduate employees to be successful in today's economy. This was appropriately stated by Gunawardana (2009) when expressing there is a need to develop and improve skills in relation to the 21st century workforce.

University-Industry relationship is another aspect that needs to be considered. A number of reports prepared by employers have insisted that Universities make more explicit efforts to develop the 'key', 'core', 'transferable', 'soft', 'employable' and 'generic skills' required for various types of employment. World Bank Human Development Unit (2009) emphasized majority of the Universities are unable to maintain close interaction with

the industry and its curriculum development and teaching. This reveals there is a need to attend to suitable curriculum development and also to develop more relevant skills to meet the needs of the labour market.

A study conducted recently involving private sector senior executives from seven major sectors of the economy, namely, Banking, Insurance, Garments, Information Technology, Telecommunication, Food and Beverages and Shipping revealed that besides imparting subject knowledge, developing core skills and personality attributes was very important at University level (Chandrasiri, 2008). Interviews with Human Resource Managers had revealed that graduates should possess three main competencies, namely, Technical, Conceptual and Behavioral competencies. Technical and conceptual competencies deal with subject knowledge and theoretical background to understand problems in real world situations, while the behavioral component covers attitudes and values of graduates seeking employment in private sector organizations. In this respect, local graduates are found to be strong in technical and conceptual competencies but weak in behavioral competencies. This employers' perspective on quality of graduates emphasizes the need for developing soft skills as a strategy to enhance employability of graduates in Sri Lanka. This highlights the need to streamline the existing education curricula to suit employers' requirements. Murray (1994) as quoted by Wilhelm (2002) pointed out that in respect of employers' perspective human relations skills are more important than conceptual and technical skills. Soft skills are identified to be the most important skills in successful professional practice. The major role and responsibility of a professional teacher is to develop these skills in themselves and in their students.

Therefore, this study is of great significance to the undergraduates of Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) Degree programme with respect to future employment.

Sri Lankan Qualifications Framework (SLQF) put forward by the Ministry of Higher Education (2015) is a nationally consistent framework for all higher education qualifications offered in Sri Lanka. The SLQF defines Learning outcomes are statements that describe what learners should know, understand and can demonstrate upon the completion of a course or study programme.

In this context, considering the issues in employment, there is a need to integrate the development of soft skills in undergraduates who aim at securing future employment.

2. Research Problem

There is a continuous lack of employment among students who follow Bachelor's Degree courses in Social Sciences and Humanities in Sri Lankan Universities. One of the reasons that has been pointed out for this is that the curricula of the Bachelor's Degree courses do not necessarily cater to the needs of the labour market. The skills needed for the 21st century workforce have not been found to receive the necessary attention or the emphasis of Degree Course curricula in Universities.

During the past, it was the homes that laid the foundation for these skills which were strengthened within schools and community. This prepared the youth for entering the workforce. Lack of such preparedness has led to increased levels of issues in all environments such as the family, schools, universities and the workplace. The trend of being examination-oriented takes the students away from co-curricular activities resulting in further lack of preparedness for the labour market. The students themselves seem not to realize the gravity of such unpreparedness.

The labour market expects new entrants to commence work immediately on recruitment. The demand is such that the employers do not look forward to training new comers but get the maximum from them right from commencement of employment.

The research problem of this study was determining how to incorporate and integrate soft skills into Bachelor of Education undergraduates seeking professional employment.

3. Purpose

The purpose of the study was to develop soft skills among the Bachelor of Education undergraduates through integration of these skills into the teaching learning process.

4. Literature Review

With respect to definitions of soft skills there is a vast amount of literature by various authors. Soft Skills are skills essential for personal development, social participation and workplace success. These include skills such as

communication, ability for team work, adaptability, etc.,(Kechagias, (Ed.). 2011).These are characterized as “skills” to emphasize that they can be learned/developed by appropriate training, and by combining these, complex outcomes can also be achieved.

Generic skills are considered as skills applicable and useful in various contexts and are those that can be transferred among different occupations. Generic skills include soft skills and additional abilities such as literacy, numeracy, technology use, and others(Kechagias, (Ed.). 2011).

Soft Skills are an active combination of cognitive and meta-cognitive skills, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills and ethical values. They help people to adapt and behave optimistically in order to help them to deal successfully with the challenges they face in their professional life and daily life (Haselberger et al., 2015).

Certain university communities agree on the generic attributes their students should develop during their course of study. While including the technical knowledge the student should gain, they also go beyond these and consist of qualities that prepare graduates to be mediators of social good in an unknown future environment (Bowden et al., 2000).

Jain (2009) suggested a model for implementing soft skills in higher education. A holistic approach is used to plan and implement the soft skills among students of higher education based on formal teaching and learning activities, support programs and the students’ campus life. The two models suggested for development of soft skills among the students through formal teaching and learning activities are, the Stand Alone Subject Model that uses the approach of training and providing opportunities to students to develop soft skills through specific courses that are carefully planned for this purpose and the Embedded Model using the approach of embedding the soft skills in teaching and learning across the curriculum. Although these models described have weaknesses and strengths, Jain (2009) developed another model called the **Combination of Stand Alone Subject Model and Embedded Model**. This model allows the Faculty to introduce special courses if necessary, and also, as needed, to integrate elements to run the program. This study focused on how the Faculty of Education, University of Colombo will use the embedded model in teaching and learning across the curriculum.

There are a number of frameworks describing the soft skills schemes in various countries. United States workplace know-how 21st century literacy framework (Curtis, 2010) was selected as suitable to develop soft skills for success in the 21st century role of graduate teachers.

Joubert et al. (2006) conducted a study to examine the subjective meanings that students attributed to soft skills. They examined and observed medical undergraduates’ experiences and viewpoints on soft skills with a sample of two groups of students using an exploratory qualitative research methodology chosen to discern the subjective meanings. The first group (2001) had followed the traditional curriculum and the second group (2002) had followed the reformed curriculum. Data collection was carried out with individual interviews, focused group interviews and solicited autobiographical sketches. The qualitative data were subjected to manual Analysis. This research showed how qualitative methods helped to capture and explore aspects of the inner life of these students.

Finding that the graduate unemployment issue was related to the view that they have not acquired adequate employability skills at the university, Idrus et al. (2009) conducted a study on challenges faced by lecturers in a private university in Malaysia in their attempts towards integration of soft skills when dispensing technical courses to engineering students. For those engaged in technical careers such as engineering, soft skills were thought to be very important for effective utilization of their technical knowledge at work. Employers were stressing that it was not sufficient for success as an engineer to possess strong academic and technical capabilities alone. They need to possess soft skills to complement technical skills when they graduate. Idrus et al. (2009) discovered three major challenges faced by lecturers when attempting to integrate soft skills into their teaching, namely, the students’ attitude in the classroom, limited time to cover the syllabus, and having large numbers of students in a classroom. Students showed lack of attentiveness to lessons that incorporate soft skills, in addition to lacking interest in developing soft skills for themselves. Time was insufficient even to cover the technical syllabus and making plans and preparations to integrate soft skills into the syllabus would need much time, expertise and sensitivity to job market needs.

Idrus et al. (2009) deduced that rather than the time constraint, teachers were not conversant with teaching methods for integrating soft skills into their teaching within the allocated time. With respect to large numbers of students in the classroom, teachers expressed that individual attention was needed for integrating soft skills, which

was not possible in large classes. Integrating soft skills does not mean adding a new topic to the syllabus or adding extensive activities in teaching but embedding these into already existing assignments and undertakings. It is the job of educators to assist students to acquire such skills. Soft skills needed to be identified for integration into teaching and communicated to the students for them to understand the relevance of these skills in their professional success. The study revealed “the need for lecturers to be creative, innovative and proactive in their teaching approaches in order to integrate soft skills in their teaching” (Idrus et al., 2009, p.78).

Grero (2019) in a research study questioned academics on whether the subjects and their content help in developing soft skills in undergraduates. Majority of the academics agreed that written and verbal communication, analytical skills, problem solving and teamwork, creativity and organizing were being developed. However, only around 50% agreed that leadership, flexibility, confidence, multi-tasking and self-motivation were developed.

Subramaniam (2013) conducting a research on teachers’ perception on their readiness in integrating Soft Skills in the teaching and learning process found the effectiveness of integrating soft skills in the teaching and learning process invariably depends on the readiness, comprehension and the knowledge of the teacher. In short, the effectiveness of integrating soft skills in the teaching and learning process invariably depends on the readiness, comprehension and the knowledge of the teacher.

5. Methodology

This study followed a case study method in which evidence was collected, analyzed and discussed with respect to the existing situation on developing soft skills in the Bachelor of Education undergraduate program of the Faculty of Education, University of Colombo and proposed how these can be integrated. The selection was based on the fact that the Bachelor of Education Special Degree program is a combined degree where a student will acquire a general degree qualification by satisfying the successful completion of three academic subjects from the Faculty of Arts and professional subjects from the Faculty of Education.

The study included both primary data collection and secondary data collection. Primary data collection used qualitative and quantitative approaches. Two Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data with a qualitative data collection process that consisted of interviews conducted. Secondary data collection was based on documented information available.

Hundred (100) Bachelor of Education final year undergraduates (Sinhala, English and Tamil Medium) and ten (10) university lecturers from the Faculty of Education, University of Colombo constituted the sample. The reason for including the undergraduates in the sample was that they would become graduate teachers in future. In addition, five international school principals were selected for the sample to find out the type of graduates required by these schools to meet the 21st century needs. The reason to select these principals arose from the fact that they are highly involved in the international scenario with a student base that would mostly focus on foreign studies later on.

Two separate *Questionnaires* were prepared addressing the Bachelor of Education undergraduates and the lecturers of the Faculty of Education, respectively. The *Questionnaire* addressing the Bachelor of Education undergraduates included some open-ended questions. The main purpose of these Questionnaires was to identify the most important soft skills needed by the Bachelor of Education teachers. It was based on the American Model for 21st century student outcomes and support system. The reason for selecting this particular Model was because this Model had included most of the soft skills in relation to the teaching profession. Also, this Model being an Embedded Model, it was easy to link it to subject contents and has created a comprehensive framework for conceptualizing different types of soft skills important for the workforce.

The instrument Soft Skills Assessment (SSA) developed for this study as an appropriate instrument was not revealed in the review of literature. The Soft Skill Assessment is comprised of a five-point Likert-type Scale that assesses the four areas: i). The current awareness (knowledge) level of soft skills, ii). Importance of soft skills to teachers iii). Contribution of the B. Ed course to develop soft skills, iv). Factors that affect teaching learning process to develop soft skills.

Views of undergraduates were obtained through a Questionnaire based on 21 soft skills, namely, Communication Skills, Critical thinking Skills, Open-mindedness, Interpersonal Skills, Team-Work, Personal Skills, Work Ethics, Skills related to the community, Innovation & Creativity, Presentation Skills, Assertiveness, Organizational

Skills, Time Management, Motivation, Listening Skills, Decision Making skills, Entrepreneurship, Problem Solving Skills, Analytical Skills, Assessing skills and Leadership Skills.

Methods followed included *One-to-one Interview* with each of the ten lecturers at the Faculty of Education and five principals of international schools based on current soft skills development and best practices; *Personal Interview Questions for Lecturers: Self-reflective Questionnaire* for Undergraduates; *School Experience Reports* for Undergraduates; *Self-evaluation Questionnaire* for Undergraduates and *Evaluation of undergraduates by lecturers*.

Undergraduates get an opportunity to obtain hands on experience in a school of their own locality for a two-week period during the 4th academic year. They are expected to focus on administration in the school, leadership role of the school principal, observe other teachers' role for teaching learning processes, relationship between the school and the community, and co-curricular activities, and finally present a report on all these aspects to the Faculty of Education. The school principal too sends a separate report on the undergraduate evaluating mostly the social competencies of the undergraduate.

6. Results

Under the Higher Education for Twenty First Century (HETC) Project, *strengthening the soft skills of students* was one of the activities supported to achieve the aim of the University Development Grant to strengthen the economic and social relevance of university programs. Under this activity it was proposed to introduce courses geared towards the development of soft skills, into the Faculty curriculum for developing soft skills among undergraduates. The course structure for the B. Ed degree program includes 13 professional subjects and soft skills were incorporated into these subjects under the project. The project also highlighted methods for incorporating these soft skills. Incorporating soft skills into the curriculum was done under learning outcomes, syllabus contents, instructional system, soft skills, time, resources and assessment. Following the HETC Project, the syllabuses were revisited subject-wise and necessary improvements were made for incorporating soft skills in the B. Ed Course curriculum. The Sri Lankan Quality Framework was adapted to the 13 subjects of the curricula. Lecturers try their best to promote and inculcate self-learning habits through the curriculum. Undergraduates are able to achieve these soft skills through the embedded curriculum model.

The undergraduates were asked to state their level of satisfaction with respect to the contribution made by the B. Ed Course for developing the skills and a mixed response was obtained. Majority (80%) undergraduates stated they were very satisfied with the contribution of the Course towards Time management skills. More than 60% were very satisfied with the contribution towards development of skills such as Teamwork (78.95%), Work Ethics and Presentation Skills (73.68%), Interpersonal skills (67.37%), Organizational Skills (64.21%), Motivation (62.11%) and Listening Skills (60%). More than 60% of the undergraduates expressed satisfaction for Creative thinking skills, Skills related to Community, Entrepreneurship and Analytical Skills, Problem solving skills, and Assertiveness. However, 17.89% undergraduates expressed dissatisfaction with respect to Entrepreneurship.

Among the teaching methods proposed by undergraduates for developing their soft skills Group Method took priority (78.94%) followed by Discussion (48.42%), with lesser numbers proposing the Project method (17.89%) and Drama method (13.68%). Results indicated undergraduates did not have much faith in other methods such as Case Study, Lecture method and Activity Based Learning, totals varying between 2.10% and 7.37% of them. However, lecturers in answer to their questionnaire preferred the Project method with respect to communication skills, Personal skills, Community skills, Innovation and Creativity and Leadership skills, and the Group method for Open-mindedness, Interpersonal skills, Team work and Professional ethics, and the Discussion method was preferred for Critical thinking and Professional ethics.

At individual interviews various questions were put forward to the lecturers on development and assessment soft skills and challenges faced by them and how these are overcome during their academic year. Among them, 80% stated that these learning outcomes of soft skills are incorporated into the curriculum itself. Each lecturer has considered the soft skills relevant to their subject as an intended learning outcome. Two lecturers stated that they do not consider their teaching process as specifically focusing on developing a soft skill.

Lecturers stated they carry out formative assessments such as written tests, written communication, presentations, projects, group assignments, problem solving, peer evaluation, feedback, demonstration, and active listening in addition to workshops relevant to skills development. Lecturers also used individual marking schemes as well as

orientation workshops (80%) and professional workshops (40%) for assessing soft skills, in addition to a summative assessment, for example, teaching practice where 80% expressed at which they assess soft skills. Soft skills are also assessed through school experience of undergraduates where the lecturers follow up their students during the academic year. When assessing soft skills, lecturers place priority on communication skills, critical thinking, teamwork and presentation skills. In addition, the lecturers gave priority to soft skills teaching methods used in teaching such as Presentation, Portfolio, Group method and Field work.

Principals of International Schools on being asked if soft skills were taken into consideration in the teaching learning process responded that innovative teaching was being encouraged in teachers and that continuous assessment was being done. With respect to assessing soft skills in teachers, preparation of lessons, making use of presentations for imparting the best knowledge, combined with critical thinking and practical skills were being given marks in the marking scheme. Communication skills and IT related skills were given importance in assessing soft skills.

The undergraduates listed 17 factors that helped them towards development of soft skills. Interpersonal activities, Teaching method, Experience, Presentation, Group assignment and Team work were listed in order of preference as important factors among these. However, when the lecturers were asked for the factors that contributed to development of their own soft skills, a large number of factors had been mentioned, home curriculum and school curricula taking priority.

Undergraduates on being asked whether their soft skills had been assessed at their examinations, 59% of them had given positive answers that it has been done, while 15% had answered in the negative. However, there were 19% of the undergraduates who revealed that assessment had been done only to a certain extent.

Among 9 topics assessed by the lecturers with respect to Soft Skills demonstrated by undergraduates, those relating to Teaching practice, Group and Individual Presentation, and Professional Workshop Presentation were stated by undergraduates as taking priority of place for evaluation by the relevant lecturers.

The school experience reports of undergraduates were evaluated based on Communication skills, Teamwork skills, Leadership skills, Integration of personal, educational and social soft skills and whether the undergraduate had an overall Vision. The identification of main soft skills by undergraduates during school experience was found to be at a very satisfactory level. The themes identified by them on main soft skills proves this as these contained a wide range of aspects pertinent to soft skills that need to be developed in school environment. The views proposed by them reveal they are able to think critically on how they can develop these skills through what they proposed. They are able to reflect on practical situations that generally arise in schools and are able to propose ways and means of remedying such situations. They can identify the basic issues at ground level and propose practical remedies so that these do not develop into serious problems later. They have even thought of ways to update parents on the progress of their children by proposing Quality Circles.

Those who were rated by the lecturers as being very good in certain skills had higher overall final marks obtained at teaching practice ranging from 66 to as high as 75 marks, the latter being the highest total obtained by a student. All of the 33 students had obtained above 50 out of 100 total marks in their teaching practice.

The relevant lecturers also gave guidance to the undergraduates for developing soft skills through teaching practice. Among the Soft Skills, Communication skills and Interpersonal Skills had been introduced and identified as essential skills in the teaching profession. Lecturers in their comments highlighted weaknesses and proposed measures for developing these. Teamwork and Leadership and Presentation skills were identified as important soft skills for a teacher, and these were developed at Group activities. Presentation skills were one of the suitability characteristics judged when recruiting teachers to International Schools which was practically tested at recruitment.

Lecturers proposed several guidelines for developing creativity in teachers and students. These included, developing creative teaching aids and providing opportunities and guidance for creativity, encouraging student-learning, linking subject matter with life, enhancing creativity through teaching methodology, planning the lesson in a way that children get fresh experiences, making planned efforts for student creativity and allowing student creative skills development.

Lecturers guided the undergraduates in developing Critical Skills important in assessing how much the students have grasped the lesson. It also goes with creativity and innovation which are major aims of education and the teacher needs to possess these skills.

7. Discussion

The research revealed the importance of soft skills for those engaged in the teaching profession. However, both literature and previous research have revealed that there were opportunities for developing soft skills *informally* within the family in early life and in school environment through various activities and interpersonal relationships. Skill development is a dynamic process. The early years are important in laying the foundation for the later years. Yet with the trend of being examination oriented and changes in society where competition has assumed priority, the students have been taken away from participatory activities leading to lack of opportunities for developing soft skills needed for employability and life as a whole. Therefore, the need has arisen to develop these skills *formally* as revealed by both literature and findings of the research study.

The undergraduates obtained opportunities through the curriculum for developing soft skills, such as through teaching practice, professional workshops, group and individual presentations. The lecturers also found teaching practice and workshops to be important for developing soft skills while also mentioning school experience and group work as important.

Although the undergraduates stated that communication, team work, organization and time management were not being evaluated at examination level, these skills are actually being evaluated at examination level. Therefore, it is important that undergraduates be made aware of evaluation criteria at examination level. Similarly, lecturers carry out formative assessment, but the undergraduates may not be aware of the criteria used in this assessment. Sedere (2019) clarified that “conventional education in both developed and developing nations, including the transitional economies use assessment in general for certification and awarding of grades as summative assessment. This is called *assessment of learning*. More progressive education systems used *assessment for learning* to facilitate learning and instruction as formative assessment” (p.280). “*Formative assessment is much valued and needed even under authentic or performance-based skills oriented learning*” (p.283). Considering the situation in the current B. Ed programme it is clear that there is formative assessment of skills by lecturers, but again the students may not be aware of it as such. It is important that the undergraduates be made aware of the fact that their skills are being assessed continuously, and the various criteria used in this type of continuous formative assessment, for creating personal interest in them in developing these skills.

Time management is a skill that needs to be developed right from the beginning and this is important as this is a skill that gets transferred to students looking at the example set by the teacher.

The lecturers had stated a few methods for developing time management skills, such as, working with good preparation, preparing teaching aids, writing lesson notes the previous day for managing time, inculcating the practice of working on time, the need for completing the day’s work within the day itself and completing each activity as per the time given in the lesson depicting maturity in a person. With respect to students, it is important to inculcate time management through group work and other activities they engage in the school.

Kechagias (2011) commented rather than completely depending on teacher assessment, self-assessment could promote deep approaches to learning. Depending only on teacher assessment would encourage what he called adopting “either surface learning or achieving orientation to learning” (p.115).

When assessing soft skills of undergraduates, lecturers mostly placed priority on communication skills, critical thinking, teamwork and presentation skills. However, Onabamiro et al. (2014) recommended that assessment of soft skills begin with secondary schools and that there should be a purposeful strictly implemented national education policy at all levels of education for training of teachers on teaching and assessing soft skills.

As highlighted by Sedere (2019), the expectation is to examine the ‘Cognitive Skills’ rather than simply knowledge and thinking at lower level. Therefore, how the students understand learning contents and their Higher Order Thinking Skills are assessed using various types of assessments. Tests that are traditionally given such as multiple choice questions, essay questions could be given to assess content achievement if necessary. However, analytical reports, ability to make judgements, portfolio presentations by students could be used for assessing higher cognitive skills for which there need to be standards.

Sedere (2019) bemoaned that the present emphasis given to formal education is heavily academic and examination-oriented which are mostly paper-pencil tests that direct students to memorize subject matter and repeat these at tests. According to Sedere (2019) this *learning culture needs to be changed by changing the examination culture to an "Assessment Culture" where multiple measures of assessment are in-built and integrated with authentic instructional system and focus on skills as a learning outcome* (p.118). The author stressed the need for adopting such changes and accommodating all opportunities available for enriching learner skills and performance. Grero (2019) agreed with the above statement made by Sedere (2019) when he said the general education process in Sri Lanka at present, carries syllabuses with heavy theory sections that focus on examinations alone. In this process the teachers expect the students to memorize the theory sections and this is evaluated through summative assessments to offer marks, grades, class positions and other incentives. This demotivates and prevents school children from taking part in various other important activities and obtaining hands-on experience and other generic skills.

Grero (2019) also highlighted that the performance of the education and training system will be of importance when judging the flexibility of youth that come out of the system with respect to their knowledge and the skills to see if it is sufficient enough for them to work in an economy that is becoming increasingly diversified and to judge if they can adapt themselves to a world of unforeseeable changes. As such developing comprehensive indicators is needed and these need to address the mismatch between education and employability. Conducting research is an essential factor to get an accurate picture of the current scenario in order to develop these indicators.

Undergraduates gave priority to interpersonal skills, teaching method, experience and presentation as the factors that helped them to develop soft skills. Lecturers prioritized home curriculum and school curriculum as the factors that helped them to develop their own soft skills. Undergraduates expressed as having developed communication skills, team work and leadership skills to a very satisfactory or satisfactory level during school experience. However, most of them had not integrated personal, educational and social soft skills into their lives and did not show much concern about a Vision in their teaching profession and the researcher sees this as a matter for concern. However, there were also a few undergraduates who had focused and expressed their Vision specifically.

Even though the teaching practice component has been identified as a summative assessment, this can be used for evaluating the undergraduate's soft skills. Among these, the researcher placed priority on communication skills, interpersonal skills, team work, leadership skills, presentation skills, assessing skills, time management, critical skills, creativity and professional ethics. Although attempts were made to get them to assess their own soft skills before teaching practice, in reality, during teaching practice the level of soft skills displayed by most was lower than what they judged themselves to possess. However, they were able to develop these skills due to supervision and guidance and mentoring by lecturers.

Evaluation was done on each undergraduate as a summative assessment. This evaluation provides an opportunity for the undergraduate to develop these skills while engaging practically in teaching practice. The comments given by the supervisor for each undergraduate shows the amount of useful guidance provided for developing their soft skills further. As such the teaching practice component can be considered as an occasion in which a number of relevant skills possessed by the undergraduate is being monitored, guided, judged and evaluated.

It is of importance that incorporating soft skills into curricula has come from the University Grants Commission itself. The SLQF has also shown its importance. A major observation by the researcher was that considerable time is needed for this and student-centred learning opportunities can be increased and a well-planned prior preparation is essential. Through activities, the undergraduates get more opportunities to be active, thus leading them to be creative, innovative and participatory while applying what is relevant to life and society.

Lecturers also faced several challenges when incorporating soft skills into the curricula, such as lack of time to cover the syllabus, large numbers of undergraduates in the lecture room and lack of facilities. When incorporating soft skills into the curricula, the lecturers need to ensure that it does not add more activities, understand the importance of integration and the lecturer needs to create the necessary environment for it.

Communication skills is stated as the first skill needed for employability. Kechagias, (Ed.). (2011) stated that soft skills such as intra-and inter-personal (socio-emotional) skills, are essential for workplace success and that "they include skills, such as communication, ability to work on multidisciplinary teams, flexibility, etc." (p.33). Andrews and Higson (2007) in their research on graduate employability found that both employers and graduates

emphasized the importance of good, all round communication skills and abilities. Some employers felt graduates were lacking the basic etiquette normally expected at work. For example, the simple morning greeting was lacking. They were too informal in electronic communication. These authors suggested that communication skills could be developed and enhanced across the curricula. This could especially be done through course work and assignments, in the process of communicating with faculty staff and during work-based learning experiences. However, with respect to teaching, this skill is mostly dependent on the restricted environment in the classroom with a limited number of students.

Interpersonal skills are also considered as essential skills needed by a teacher. Fleischmann (2013) studying soft skills of excellent teachers in diverse South African schools in the Western Cape found that the ranking of soft skills was very similar and did not differ greatly depending on the school context. Lecturers in this study observed weaknesses in this aspect and provided guidance for improvement and further development of these skills. Among these were, encouraging students to give individual answers instead of common answers, using strategies for getting students' active participation, maintaining eye contact, using questioning and its advantages and maintaining cordial relationships with the students. The need for using techniques for developing student-teacher and student-student relationships was also highlighted.

Group activities are given to students to develop a number of skills that are important for life. Andrews and Higson (2007) found that both graduates and employers identified teamwork as a major feature in graduate employment and proposed a number of teaching and learning strategies for developing teamwork skills, such as, group and project work, tutorials, classroom team discussions and debates, group focused case studies and work-based learning, most of which are also incorporated into B. Ed curricula in the University of Colombo. Andrews and Higson (2007) suggested leadership skills could be developed during work-based learning, group work, projects and extra-curricular activities. Lecturers made specific mention of group activities for developing student skills, team spirit, focusing on ground rules when doing group activities, time considerations, and guidance to obtain the expected objectives from the group method. Ahonen-Rainio et al. (2014) highlighted that projects provide excellent opportunities to integrate teaching of transferable skills, stressing when teams are diverse, they support learning of teamwork skills, negotiation and creativity. The authors stressed the importance of focusing on training students in transferable skills from the first year to graduation.

Verbal presentation skills were identified as an area of greatest weakness by both employers and graduates in the study conducted by Andrews and Higson (2007) and suggested developing these across the curricula, especially during formal lectures and tutorials where students could be encouraged to develop and practice making oral presentations in front of peers and teachers.

Lowden et al. (2011) listed critical thinking among a range of other broader skills and attributes such as teamwork, communication, leadership, problem solving and managerial abilities that employers expect graduates to display while also having technical and subject-based competences from their degrees.

Due to lack of innovation in the classroom, some innovative individuals have got out of the system and sought ways of developing themselves. Sedere (2019) described the example of individuals such as Thomas Edison and Hendry Ford among these and quoted the examples of Samsung C & T Corporation, Google Multinational Technology Company. The author also said, "there were many more leading industries on corporate learning culture and innovation that education has to learn lessons from." (p.211).

Grero (2019) spoke of the limited numbers that enroll in state universities for free education. This extremely limited access has created fierce competition among General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) students, which as a consequence has killed their interest in any other activities that go to develop hands-on skills and generic skills. As a result, Sri Lanka is having to carry a student population that lacks social skills and is self-centered. Also, the percentage of students that enroll in universities is low by global standards.

In a survey conducted by Chandrasiri (2008) with senior executives from prominent private sector firms, the author found that lack of creativity had stood out as one of the most prominent weaknesses among employed graduates. However, these industry leaders had agreed that specific technical skills could be learned on the job or through university training.

The following were proposed by Faculty lecturers for developing professional ethics in undergraduates: importance of developing teacher personality, making effort to develop a personality that the students can learn from, showing the benefits of directing students for self-learning, developing personality through peer evaluation, being committed to teaching, and providing examples through lessons.

Referring to teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching transferable skills, Ahonen-Rainio et al.(2014) spoke of the need for teachers to actively develop themselves in teaching transferable skills. They need to study the underlined theories and search for suitable teaching methods. Allocating time for transferable skills may reduce time for content teaching, but it produces impacts in overall learning. According to Kechagias, (Ed.). (2011) students need to develop their abilities to interpret standards, judge their own performances and make improvements in order to achieve the learning outcomes that are suggested for formative assessment.

Grero (2019) recommended establishing university-industry cells be made mandatory to every university, thereby linking the university with all possible industries and businesses. This cell should provide necessary information to every university to the career guidance unit, curriculum developers and research and development branch of the university regarding the demands and requirements of existing industries and businesses. Industries can develop a research culture in university students by motivating them to carry out researches which are critical for the development of different products in industries.

Ahonen-Rainio, et al. (2014) also suggested that quality teaching of transferable skills be rewarded. The authors also suggested that Aalto university teachers' pedagogical training include a module on teaching 'how to teach transferable skills', in the form of a separate course itself, or a workshop, or even as part of some academic course. The authors argued that apart from benefitting the student through better teaching, it would also benefit teachers themselves in their work life at university. These authors also suggested that teachers who possess experience should provide peer support to those who need experience in transferable skills. The Degree programs could assume a leading role in organizing informal meetings to share the experiences and challenges in this regard, for example, by organizing support clinic activities or regular networking opportunities. University should also have a collection of books and other materials about transferable skills available to teachers and they should know about their existence.

According to the SLQF Framework, the concept of outcome based education becomes important when aligning the curriculum. The graduate profile falls under outcome based education. When designing the curriculum, graduate profile and intended learning outcomes need to be aligned. In addition, teaching methods and intended learning outcomes have to be aligned.

The principals of international schools who were interviewed revealed that the schools themselves did not have special programmes designed for soft skills development. Yet they agreed the soft skills that were discussed at the interview were important for teachers.

In keeping with the recommendation made by the University Grants Commission (2015) that the Faculty/Institute adopt the policy for considering the guidelines and standards of the SLQF Framework in designing and development of curricula, the Faculty of Education has already revisited its curriculum and made the necessary improvements following SLQF guidelines. In the Manual for Review of Undergraduate Study Programs of Sri Lankan Universities and Higher Education Institutions (University Grants Commission, 2015) soft skills development falls under the criterion 'Program Design and Development'. In the program review done focusing the Faculty of Education in the University of Colombo by an external review panel (Program Review, 2018) based on this Manual, the Faculty was awarded an A grade. The Review commended the high employability rate, incorporation of soft skills to the teaching learning process and student learning teaching strategies that are in practice in the Faculty of Education. The findings of the review confirm that the Faculty has already introduced and is putting into practice the development of soft skills along with the curriculum.

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