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Factors Determining Soft Skills Among Faculty Members of Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Soft skills have become an important part of the teaching practices and professional achievement in the higher education sector to complement the formal academic education and field knowledge. The current research focuses on the determinants of soft skills among the faculty members of higher education institutions with the special focus on the identification of the main dimensions, which promote the development of soft skills. The 498 of the participants who were part of the faculty were surveyed on a structured questionnaire, and the data obtained were put through a factor analysis to reveal some latent patterns among the chosen soft-skill variables. The sphericity test by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett test verified the suitability of the data in the factor analysis processes. The outcomes of the factor analysis revealed four different items as different components: Cognitive and Analytical Skill; Social and Self-Management Competencies, Collaborative and Relationship building Skill, and Personal Adaptability and Professional Maturity that explained 67.945‘ of the overall variance. The paper highlights the fact that faculty soft skills are multidimensional in character and that it is a product of individual and institutional factors. The results support a growing need of the structured programmes in the area of the improvement of the soft skills in order to increase the efficiency of teaching, the level of student engagement, and the overall quality of academic performance. The paper is able to give practical suggestions concerning faculty development, which includes systematic training, mentoring, reflective practice, performance-based incentives, and the development of a supportive institutional environment. This study will add to the limited amount of empirical literature in that field and will provide advice to the policymakers and institutions willing to incorporate soft-skill development into the policy and practice framework of higher education.

***Keywords*:** Soft Skills, Higher Education Faculty, Teaching Effectiveness, Cognitive Skills, Interpersonal Skills, Emotional Intelligence, and Professional Development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Professional efficacy of the faculty in modern higher education becomes not limited to the disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical skills but covers a wide range of soft skills that are considered to contribute to the creation of the learning experience (Jarjabka et al., 2024). The academic and social support of students through these kinds of interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies, like communication, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, teamwork, and adaptability, are instrumental in creating academically engaging and socially supportive environment in educational institutions, with institutions becoming more and more focused on their implementation not only in teaching quality, but also in promoting a culture of engagement, collaboration, and innovation that is in line with the global academic and industry standards (Students Prospects and the Quality of Education at a Higher Education Institution - Research Report, 2025).

Effective soft skill acquisition equips the faculty with the ability to control the dynamics of the classroom, motivate students, and communicate inclusively, thus promoting the overall growth of the students (Chan & Alegria, 2023). The skills of critical thinking, time management, conflict resolution, and adaptation to the needs of diverse learning will help educators to complete not only academic but also

mentoring duties and is especially relevant when dealing with students that face difficulty in unfamiliar or challenging learning environments as well as providing the skills that are considered in the modern workplace (HILL, 2016). With the transition to higher education being learner-centric, digitally-enriched, and multidisciplinary, the soft-skill aspect of teachers is an essential part of the organizational performance and student achievement.

The modern academic literature has established a wide range of soft skills as communication, interpersonal relations, emotional intelligence, adaptability, problem-solving, and time management as the critical success factors in the processes of teaching and learning (Isiguzel, 2025). However, in spite of increased interest in their significance, the empirical studies examining the factors that determine the development of soft-skills in higher-education faculty is still scarce, especially in the context of high-paced educational changes.

It is in this background that the current study examines the factors that affect the growth of soft-skills in the faculty in higher institutions of learning. The study aims to inform the professional development programs, institutional policy change, and quality-improvement initiatives in the system of higher education by describing the contextual circumstances that facilitate the formation of the most influential soft-skin dimensions and clarifying the nature of these dimensions.

2. Review of Literature

The emergence of soft skills among the members of faculty in higher education has largely been recognized as a worldwide requirement in eminent provision of effective pedagogical practices as well as improved learning outcomes. The presence of soft skills in the form of communication, teamwork, leadership, emotional intelligence, adaptability, and problem-solving is always supported by empirical evidence as inalienable aspects of the present-day teaching competence (Волкова et al., 2020; Mabić et al., 2024). Such competencies can be broadly divided into social and communication skills, cognitive skills, and emotional or personal traits, which are the reasons to believe that educators have a multidimensional role in the current dynamic contexts of learning (Волкова et al., 2020).

Cognitive soft skills are found to be key to intellectual growth and they are planning, critical thinking, creative thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving (Muammar and Alhamad, 2023). When faculty members have mastered these abilities, they can better maintain the academic engagement and direct students towards thinking in an analytical and reflective manner. Similarly, social and communication skills, including active listening, collaboration, interpersonal effectiveness, and group coordination, equally contribute to the establishment of inclusive, learner-centred educational settings (Mitsea et al., 2021). These skills serve as a tool of reinforcing classroom interaction, decreasing the anxiety of the students, and enhancing his overall participation.

Emotional intelligence has been greatly defended in the field of academia. The identified influential factors are empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, and sensitivity to the needs of students to continue to motivate students and maintain a psychologically safe learning environment (Blyznyuk, 2023). The emotional competencies also affect the conflict resolution, classroom management, and the differentiation instruction, which collectively have an effect on the effectiveness of teaching and the satisfaction of students (Chan & Alegricia, 2023). Literature also suggests that teachers have a central role in imparting the key soft skills including creativity, teamwork, and critical thinking to learners and, so, depict the interdependence between the competence of the faculty and student outcomes (Bahmat et al., 2023).

Work environments outside of education are also a good source of great knowledge on the applicability of soft skills in relation to employability and retention. Research indicates that some of the most requested professional skills in modern work environments are communication, teamwork, and time management, which raises direct implication of teaching practice in higher education (Stan, 2021; Manchini et al., 2024). This connection highlights the fact that teachers should teach soft skills to students who are about to join competitive employment markets.

Faculty soft-skilling has also been reinvented with the introduction of technology. As it has been emphasized in the research, digital communication skills, technological flexibility, and favorable views of technological devices

play a significant role in determining the performance of teaching in the post-pandemic era (Jarjabka et al., 2024; Kapasheva et al., 2024). More importantly, advanced digital teachers with team player attitudes have a greater opportunity to introduce blended, hybrid, and interactive learning approaches that can be found to be attractive to their present student demands. The communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving have been listed among the most valuable soft skills by music and language educators in specific, as they have considered them to be among the most important ones in their teaching practice (İşigüzel, 2025).

It has also been found that reflective practice and self-assessment are strategies that can be used to develop soft-skill competencies. Educators who are self-reflective are more responsive to classroom and more consistent in facilitating student engagement and student performance (Kurnaz et al., 2024). This is in accordance with the increasing support of lifelong learning and institutionalized soft-skill training initiatives in the university systems.

3. Research Gap

Decades of research have had a consistent affirmation about the efficacy of soft skills in teaching and raising the achievements of learners. However, the literature also demonstrates that there is a gap in research studies, which empirically consider the determining factors when developing soft skills among members of higher education faculty, especially in various academic settings.

Although it has been explained in several taxonomies and conceptual frameworks what the various types and relevance of soft skills are to educators, there is still limited understanding on how such things as institutional support, demographic factors, professional experience, pedagogical training and digital exposure drive the development, growth and increase of such skills within faculty.

4. Scope of the study

This study is confined to examine the factors determining soft skills among faculty members working in higher education institutions in Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu. It covers teaching professionals from universities, autonomous colleges, aided colleges, and self-financing colleges across various disciplines. The study focuses on identifying the key soft-skill dimensions and analyzing how personal and institutional factors influence their development. The findings aim to offer context-specific insights to strengthen professional development and teaching effectiveness within higher education in the Coimbatore region.

5. Objectives of the study

To determine the factors that determine soft skills among the members of the faculty in institutions of higher learning.

6. Research Methodology

Data

The information to be used in this study is mainly primary and will be collected using surveys and interviews to the members of the faculty in various higher institutions of learning.

Sampling

Using judgment sampling, both data collection was done among faculty members in different fields of disciplines in universities and colleges. The sample will be represented by 498 faculty respondents, which guarantees that there is a heterogeneous viewpoint.

7. Framework of Analysis

Data were investigated using the percentage analysis and factor analysis.

8. Significance

The importance of the research is that it examines the antecedents of soft-skill development in higher education faculty, which is quickly becoming important but qualitative research is under researched. In the modern academic setting, the following competencies include the power of communication, collaboration, flexibility, and emotional intelligence that play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of teaching and the learning experience among students. The results will provide empirical data regarding the role of demographic factors, job experience, institutional encouragement, training on pedagogy, and exposure to digital in developing soft skills among teachers. The findings will be useful to the institutions in

the Coimbatore District in developing specific faculty development programs, supportive organizational practices and performance enhancement strategies. To the members of the faculty, the research outlines the avenues of self-development and career growth by developing soft skills. In the end, the study leads to the advancement of learner-centred education, better classroom interaction, and creation of a more innovative, inclusive and future-oriented higher education ecosystem.

9. Analysis and Interpretation

Table -1: Demographic Profile

Particulars	Category	Number (n = 498)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	228	45.8
	Female	270	54.2
	Total	**498**	**100**
Age	Up to 35 Years	112	22.5
	36 – 45 Years	231	46.4
	Above 45 Years	155	31.1
	Total	**498**	**100**
Desig	AP	312	62.7
	ASP	118	23.7
	P	68	13.6
	Total	**498**	**100**
Marital Status	Married	389	78.1
	Unmarried	109	21.9
	Total	**498**	**100**
Educational Qualification	PG	208	41.8
	PG With NET /SET	92	18.5
	M.Phil / Ph.D	126	25.3
	PG With Ph.D, & NET / SET	72	14.4
	Total	**498**	**100**
Experience	Below 3 Years	104	20.9
	3 to 5 Years	97	19.5
	6 to 8 Years	132	26.5
	above 8 Years	165	33.1
	Total	**498**	**100**
Experience in Present College	Below 2 Years	142	28.5
	3 to 4 Years	162	32.5
	5 to 6 Years	76	15.3
	Greater than 6 Years	118	23.7
	Total	**498**	**100**

The demographic analysis shows that the sample is represented by 498 faculty members with higher education, although there is a slightly higher number of females (54.2) than males (45.8). Most of the respondents (46.4ᔓ) fall in the 36-45 age group, which means that most respondents are scholars in their mid-career. Professional designation 65.5% are Assistant Professors, 17.5% are Associate Professors and Professors and other 12.3% have lower proportions, as is typical of the hierarchical structure of institutions of higher learning.

Most of the respondents (78.1 majority) are married, which implies that the faculty members are stable in their professions and family. Academically, 41.8 0.00 percent are post-graduates with the rest of the participants having other qualifications like NET/SET certification, Ph.D. or both implying high research orientation. As indicated on

the distribution of the teaching experience, it is indicated that over half of the respondents have had over six years of service total numbering to more than six years indicating a workforce with a great deal of pedagogical experience.

Factors Determining Soft Skills Among Higher Education Faculty Members

The present study aims to establish the determinants of the soft skills among the members of the faculty within a higher institution of learning, using factor analysis as the major approach to analysis.

Table -2: KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.841
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3784.571
	df	105
	Sig.	.000

The KMO value of 0.841 shows the data are very appropriate in factor analysis. The Test of Sphericity is also significant (kh2 = 3784.571, $p < 0.001$), which proves that there are sufficient correlations between variables. Therefore, the factor analysis is applicable reliably to determine the factors that determine soft skills among the faculty members of higher education institutions.

Table -3: Factor Analysis

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Critical Thinking	.804			
Communication Skills	.761			
Creativity	.685			
Leadership Skills	.546			
Interpersonal Skills		.791		
Listening Skills		.719		
Time Management		.677		
Emotional Intelligence		.658		
Problem Solving			.677	
Team Work			.649	
Conflict Resolution			.613	
Empathy			.577	
Adaptability				.872
Resilience				.698
Decision Making				.573
Eigenvalues	6.128	1.673	1.340	1.051
% of Variance	40.851	11.153	8.936	7.005
Cumulative %	40.851	52.004	60.940	67.945

The factor analysis showed that there are four unique components that are used to explain a total variance of 67.945, which implies that the model has a good representation of the variables being surveyed. The first component, (1) has high loadings on critical thinking, communication skills, creativity and leadership which indicate that the variables come together to constitute a Cognitive-Analytical Skills dimension. Component 2 is characterized by loadings in the skills in interpersonal skills, listening skills, time management, and emotional

intelligence, thus reflecting the dimension of Social-Self Management Skills.

Most of the elements in component 3 are problem-solving, collaboration, conflict management, and empathy, thus defining a distinct set of Collaborative-Relationship Skills. The 4th component is adaptability, resilience, and decision making, which in combination represent Personal Agility and Professional Maturity. Taken together, the findings validate the idea that soft skills in the faculty members of higher education institutions are multi-dimensional and fall into four main groups that encompass cognitive ability, social behaviour, teamwork orientation, and individual adaptability.

The factor analysis found the four components whose eigenvalues are more than 1, which supports the suitability of keeping them to be investigated further. The eigenvalue of the first component was the greatest (6.128) and explained 40.851% of the total variance meaning that it was the most significant component to determine the soft skills. The fourth, third and second part explained 11.153, 8.936, and 7.005 of the variance respectively. The four elements, in aggregate, define 67.945% of the total variance which is generally considered to be satisfactory in terms of behavioural and social -rationality research. These results indicate that the factors that were retained are useful in capturing the underlying dimension of soft skills among the faculty members in higher education.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

✓ Conduction of one-time professional development programs to strengthen critical thinking, communication, creativity and leadership abilities.
✓ Encompass training programs on interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, listening, and time-management techniques in faculty development programs.
✓ Promote team-teaching, peer mentoring and interdisciplinary projects to supplement teamwork, empathy, conflict resolution and problem-solving skills.
✓ Hold adaptability, resilience, stress management, and decision-making workshops to help faculty to remain healthy and change-ready.
✓ Use digital learning, webinars, and virtual simulations of teaching to provide non-rigid chances of developing soft-skills.
✓ Integrate soft-competencies in performance appraisal and promotion to achieve holistic development of the faculty.
✓ Have professional mentoring and coaching programs in place to help in professional socialization and ongoing improvement of the faculties.
✓ Encourage reflective teaching by teaching portfolios, self-reflection and classroom reflection reports.
✓ Establish a collaborative, welcoming, and psychologically secure institutional culture that promotes novelty, compassion, and teamwork.
✓ Periodically evaluate the soft skills using student feedback, peer reviews, and 360-degree evaluation procedures to determine training requirements.

11. CONCLUSION

The current research focused on the determinants of soft skills in the faculty members of higher educational institutions and had the aim of isolating the key dimensions that affected their professional performance. Factor analysis findings showed that there are four different clusters of soft skills, specifically, cognitive and analytical skills, social and self-management skills, collaborative and relationship-building skills, and personal adaptability-based competencies all of which accounted for a significant portion of variance. This implies that the soft skills of faculty are multidimensional and influenced by the individual and institutional variables.

The results support the claim that today teachers must not only be knowledgeable in their subject but also be good communicators, collaborators, empathetic, imaginative, emotionally intelligent, resilient individuals to satisfy the changing needs of students, colleges, and the professional world at large. Although, most faculty members are highly qualified and experienced in their academic backgrounds, the extent of readiness in soft-skills differs, and it is necessary to regard the development mechanisms as being structured in the institutions. Enhancing the soft-skills is not only a good move when it comes to the faculty career development, but plays a significant role in improving the student learning outcomes and the quality of higher education in general.

Overall, the research indicates that systematic training, supportive working conditions, and ongoing evaluation

practices should be taken into consideration in order to support holistic professional growth. Higher education institutions can construct a more collaborative, learner-centric, and future-ready academic ecosystem by focusing on the development of soft-skills to become more appropriately enriched.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Even though the current study provides useful info regarding the antecedents of soft skills in the faculty members of higher education institutions, it simultaneously raises research questions to be pursued in the future. The study was also limited to a sample of institutions in a specific geographic area and thus, similar research may be extended to a wider geographic area or use comparative research among the states and nations in generalizing the results. Future studies might also be used to examine differences in soft-skill determinants in the various disciplinary fields like arts, sciences, engineering, and medical education to understand domain-specific skills demands.

The longitudinal studies can be implemented to regulate the changes of the faculty soft skills with the progress of time concerning the training interventions, digital transformation, and institutional changes. The connection between soft skills and student learning outcomes, job satisfaction, teaching effectiveness, and career progression may also be further investigated in the future. Qualitative or mixed-methods design- case studies, classroom observations, and in-depth interviews which may provide more information about the behavioural patterns and the influence of the context. Furthermore, forecasting models and sophisticated statistical methods can be implemented to generate the frameworks that predict the need to improve soft-skills and thus influence policy-making and training development.

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