



Enhancing Teacher Education through Soft Skills

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Abstract:

Teachers play a pivotal role in developing the future generations. Therefore, they have to be properly guided to enhance their competencies. Effectiveness and importance of teacher training programs is to elevate and improve teacher's professional abilities in teaching. The purpose of this paper is to identify how training and development program impact teachers towards developing their soft skills. This paper has reviewed the training and development program among teachers by taking into consideration the soft skills namely problem-solving skills, communication skills, decision making skills, negotiation skills and leadership skills of the teachers through systematic review of existing literature review. The research has also developed a framework and set of propositions that represents the impact of training by development programs among teachers to develop the soft skills.

Keywords: Communication skills, problem solving skills, leadership skills, decision making skills, negotiation skills

1. Introduction

Ramsden (2003) claimed that education plays a significant role in developing and shaping the economic and social development for nations in a competitive world. In knowledge- based economics, governments would view universities as a platform for change in the society and expanding prosperity. Therefore, there is necessity for highly skillful and trained graduates in nations to plan and execute thoughtful plans for improving the teaching quality in the education as mentioned in Little et al, 2007). Teaching skills would entail giving practice and training in various approaches, strategies and techniques that would assist the teachers to impart and plan instruction, give suitable reinforcement and carry out effective and efficient assessment. It encompasses effective skills for managing the class, use and preparation of instruction materials skills. Pedagogical theory encompasses the sociological, psychological and philosophical aspect that would allow the teachers to possess a strong basis for practicing the skills needed to teach in the classroom. Professional skills encompass the strategies, approaches and techniques that would assist teachers to develop their career and career growth. It encompasses counseling skills, soft skills, computer skills, information retrieving & management skills, interpersonal skills and life-long learning skills. Combination of pedagogical theory, teaching skills and professional skills would serve to develop the right attitude, skills and knowledge in teachers to promote holistic development. Education is a process of living and not a preparation for future living and both consider communication vital to successful learning. Communication has many meanings and has been defined with various different models. Communication is both receptive and expressive. Teachers must be skilled at listening to their students as well as explaining things clearly. Teachers need clarity of thought to present the material. Hunt (1987) referred to it as the process of people sending and receiving information. He conceptualized the communication model as involving a speaker, speech, listeners, and feedback.

To ensure that teaching and learning represent the two sides of a single coin or the two sides of any given class is, and always has been, education's main objective. The possibility of organizing teaching in such a way as to foster better learning has been one of the main premises of education since Comenius (1592-1604). However, when dealing with the organization and execution of such teaching in classrooms we find teachers who may or may not have the skills necessary to communicate with their students, skills that can facilitate or preclude fulfillment of the teaching proposal.

Communication is both receptive and expressive. Teachers must be skilled at listening to their students as well as explaining things clearly. Teachers need clarity of thought to present the material. They must be able to break down complex ideas into simpler parts and smaller steps to transmit to their students. They must be able to adapt their methods of communication to all students regardless of ability or learning style. They are able to "read" their students and adapt to the needs of the individual. Effective communication includes transforming the boring into the interesting and having good presentation skills.

2. Meaning of Communication

Communication refers to the exchange of thoughts and ideas with the intention of conveying information. Communication can be defined as sharing of thoughts, information and intelligence. All the activities that a person performs when he wishes to convey his message to others are nothing but the ways to achieve communication. The effective ways of communication are clarity of message, completeness of message, individual's facial expressions, eye contact, body postures, and external physical appearance

3. Need For Communication

The need for communication arises due to the need to express. None of us can live with bottled up feelings. Thus, the basic need to communicate arises, so that one can express. The same logic applies at every workplace, organization or any other place. The need for communication and the ability to communicate helps in developing efficient management, organizational skills, laying down plans, establishing a healthy work culture and resolving impending issues. Teaching profession demands good communication skill, along with the knowledge of the subject. If they are unable to teach what they know, students tend to be less involved and lose inspiration to learn. They should be motivated to speak up their viewpoints in class and raise questions, if they are unable to grab certain topic. For this, it is vital for the teachers to communicate effectively with them

4. Communication Skills between students & teachers

At the most basic level, a teacher's job is to educate students and convey information about a particular subject. It's not just regurgitating textbook knowledge, but rather, finding ways to make lessons engaging and to get students involved. Teachers need to know how to pivot their lesson plans, making them relatable to students by either comparing them to current events to help lessons sink in, or by tailoring lessons to better fit different grade levels or learning styles.

Beyond instructing students on course materials, teachers also need to develop lines of communication with students. In instances where children feel alienated or bullied, a teacher should be able to build trust with their students and use their communication skills to help students in need.

In order to foster a sense of trust and improve student-teacher communications, teachers should:

- Learn their students' names
- Understand students' likes and dislikes
- Praise good work and offer constructive feedback when a student does poor work
- Be observant of how each student normally behaves in the classroom and be alert if any behaviors seem unusual

5. Effective communication skills for teachers

Following is some of the communication skills that a teacher must possess so that they interact properly with the students.

5.1 Positive Motivation

This is one of the important things that a teacher must possess. In a class, students always have different kinds of taste and preferences over subjects. So, it is the job of the teacher to create enthusiasm and interest in the minds of the students towards a subject. It is also a teacher's role to remove any fear and inhibitions that a student may have towards a subject.

5.2 Effective Body Language

This is the most powerful communication skill that a teacher must possess. Good presentation skills include a powerful body language supported by verbal skills. This can create a long-lasting impression in the minds of the students. Thus, a teacher's lecture will inevitably become more interactive and interesting for the students. Besides, a teacher should maintain the volume, tone and rhythm of their voice during a lecture.

5.3 Sense of Humor

The importance of this factor has been regularly underestimated. A good sense of humor keeps the students active and interested in the teacher's class. A teacher who is dour and lacks humor doesn't contribute to the overall well being of the students.

5.4 Understanding the Students

Teachers should encourage students to communicate openly. There should be emphasis on cultivating a dialogue rather than a monologue. So, while solving any kind of problems in the classroom, it is always wise to hear the opinions of the students also.

5.5 Team Formation

This is a good method where you can divide the classroom into small teams and ask them to solve different problems or complete assignments. This practice will increase not only the interaction among the students but also among the teacher and students.

5.6 Technical Skills

It is also important that teachers should be up to date with all the latest teaching aids like computers, video conferencing and especially the use of internet. This will also help the students to keep up their interest in the learning process.

6. Types of communication

6.1 Based on Communication Channels

Based on the channels used for communicating, the process of communication can be broadly classified as verbal communication and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication includes written and oral communication whereas the non-verbal communication includes body language, facial expressions and visual diagrams or pictures used for communication.

6.1.1 Verbal Communication

Verbal communication is further divided into written and oral communication. The oral communication refers to the spoken words in the communication process. Oral communication can either be face-to-face communication or a conversation over the phone or on the voice chat over the Internet. Spoken conversations or dialogs are influenced by voice modulation, pitch, volume and even the speed and clarity of speaking. The other type of verbal communication is written communication. Written communication can be either via snail mail, or email. The effectiveness of written communication

depends on the style of writing, vocabulary used, grammar, clarity and precision of language.

6.1.2 Nonverbal Communication

Non-verbal communication includes the overall body language of the person who is speaking, which will include the body posture, the hand gestures, and overall body movements. The facial expressions also play a major role while communication since the expressions on a person's face say a lot about his/her mood. On the other hand, gestures like a handshake, a smile or a hug can independently convey emotions. Non verbal communication can also be in the form of pictorial representations, signboards, or even photographs, sketches and paintings.

6.2 Based on Style and Purpose

Based on the style of communication, there can be two broad categories of communication, which are formal and informal communication that have their own set of characteristic features.

6.2.1 Formal Communication

Formal communication includes all the instances where communication has to occur in a set formal format. Typically, this can include all sorts of business communication or corporate communication. The style of communication in this form is very formal and official. Official conferences, meetings and written memos and corporate letters are used for communication. Formal communication can also occur between two strangers when they meet for the first time.

Hence formal communication is straightforward, official and always precise and has a stringent and rigid tone to it.

6.2.2 Informal Communication

Informal communication includes instances of free unrestrained communication between people who share a casual rapport with each other. Informal communication requires two people to have a similar wavelength and hence occurs between friends and family. Informal communication does not have any rigid rules and guidelines. Informal conversations need not necessarily have boundaries of time, place or even subjects for that matter since we all know that friendly chats with our loved ones can simply go on and on.

7. Conclusion

The procedure of communication is dynamic concept and not a stationary. It takes presence of mind and courage to face people with the power to prove what we want to convey through communication. A communication can be said successful only if we are able to convince people for whatever we wanted to convey. Depending on the environment and circumstances the effectiveness of speech changes. It is therefore a dynamic interaction both affecting and being affected by many variables. It is a basic social process required for the growth and development of individuals, groups, society and people. Knowing good communication skills are really important in every walk of life.

Effective teachers recognize the increasing importance of technology as a tool for student learning and as a major communication resource to be developed. Technological media, classroom environment, and the teacher's verbal and non-verbal communications should all work together to send the students clear and consistent messages about classroom expectations, goals, and challenges.

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