

**RESEARCH PAPER****Endowing Teachers: The Insightful Effects of Soft Skills on Work Performance of Primary School Teachers****<sup>1</sup>Shaista Sahar\*, <sup>2</sup>Naeem Ullah and <sup>3</sup>Mazhar Hussain**

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**\*Corresponding Author**      saharshaista27@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

The current study is designed to explore the effect of soft skills on work performance of primary school teachers. Soft skills are inevitable for the success of any individual and professional. Primary school teachers are the foundation makers of any nation and have a great responsibility to imprint their students. The study was descriptive, a cluster random sampling technique was employed and data was collected from primary school teachers working in 245 schools which were selected as sample clusters for the study. A total of 930 questionnaires were distributed of which 840 responded. Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis was done. Study results showed that soft skills have a significant effect on and positive correlation with the work performance of teachers. Soft skills mastery guarantees well-rounded and adjustable teachers, proficient in interpersonal dynamics and professional settings so it is recommended that initiatives must be taken to develop soft skills in teachers.

**Keywords:**      Primary School Teachers (PST), Soft Skills, Work Performance**Introduction**

Soft skills are non-technical skills (Hurrell & Scholarios, 2012). These skills include intrapersonal and interpersonal capabilities that maximize individuals' potential to act in specific situations. Similarly, soft skills are also described as skills related to people management (Parente & Brown, 2012). Several other definitions of soft skills have evolved and several researchers have approached it from different perspectives.

As opposed to formal or technical knowledge, soft skills encompass a wide range of competencies and attributes. These skills are very challenging to showcase through conventional means. Within the realm of education, these skills possessed by teachers play a central role in the teaching and learning process (Dogan, 2021).

Soft skills play a key role to adapt and evolve in every situation; these skills are intricately bound to qualities like reasoning, complex thinking abilities, and adaptability. On the other hand, hard skills enable individuals to perform better in specific roles. These are learnable technical skills that are used to perform any specific task; math programming and engineering are examples of hard skills (Rudolph, 2017). Soft skills function in a wider context that goes beyond the immediate needs of a profession. Soft skills allow individuals to navigate the intricacies of various situations and play a part in their capabilities to grow continuously (Grisi, 2014).

Several names of soft skills have been referred to by various researchers and authors in varied contexts and all terms show the diverse cracks in which these fundamental

intrapersonal and interpersonal abilities have been labeled and characterized. Generic competencies are another name for soft skills (Poblete, 2015). Recently notions like “key competencies” and “21st century skills” the Microsoft-Intel definitions have become rampant (Hautamäki, 2015).

Undertaken has been reserved by several European projects to explore and define these skills. One distinguished project is the “Turning project” which classifies generic competencies into three major groups: interpersonal, instrumental, and systemic. Interpersonal competencies can be alienated further into social skills and individual skills, while instrumental competence encompasses methodological, linguistic, and technological skills. Systemic competencies include entrepreneurial, organizational, and leadership abilities (Poblete, 2015).

Significant recognition and importance have been gained by soft skills in the professional world in previous days. There has been wide research and detailed explanations and elaborations about soft skills, but several professionals still may not fully understand their practical implications and the precise effect they have on the individual’s personality.

Formerly soft skills were considered as inborn qualities that were not influenced by an individual’s personality type or any learning experience. Traditionally achievements were measured by perceptible grades and targets leading to certain results, however, from the latter decade several success stories have appeared where individuals have outshined in their professional lives due to their intelligence, their verbal and nonverbal communication skills, strategic thinking, and their wit. As evidenced by Lyu and Liu (2021) soft skills are substantiated by their prevalence as a recurrent job requirement in job postings. As soft skills play an essential role in equipping learners with the indispensable capability required for the professional world. According to the research conducted by Fleischmann in 2013, heightened intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviors are demonstrated by educators who are perceived as 'excellent'. A similar study was conducted by Lavilles and Robles (2017) in the Philippines, highlighting the correlation between teachers' soft skills proficiency level and school performance. Likewise in Peru, Pumacayo-Quispe (2018) established a straight association between teachers' soft skills and the organizational climate.

A study conducted by Romero-Cobeña (2019) in Ecuador focused on the teacher’s role as a trainer by maintaining quality of education in educational sets through effective management. The study highlighted that teachers contribute to nurturing a safe environment for students leading to outstanding performance.

For long ago the fundamental certainty was considered that technical or hard skills attained in the classroom are the most critical components for success, however, it has been increasingly evident that soft skills which are not formally imparted, have played a pivotal role in helping professionals and entrepreneurs in navigating and effectively addressing various issues and challenges This research aims to identify the keys of soft skills required by employers in the communal world to perform better work performance.

## **Literature Review**

Several labels are often used in literature while talking about “soft skills” (EC, 2011). This leads to ambiguity and makes it challenging to establish precise and unanimously accepted definitions that apprehend their exclusive characteristics.

Within the education system, ongoing transformations have been featured by prominent figures like Heckman (2012), Schulz (2008), and Dall’Amico (2016). However, for everyday social and professional lives, these systems are increasingly tasked with

nurturing essential skills, in this context soft skills have been characterized into three broad categories by Dall'Amico (2016), which are summarized and described below:

Certainly, here are simplified summary of the three categories of soft skills:

### **Making one's way in the world of work**

It includes seeking to learn, identifying work goals, motivation, flexibility and adaptability, respecting rules and tiered levels, values recognition and its application, responsibilities management, managing the digital process and time management.

### **Mastery in Social Skills**

It includes, communication process management, communication skills, group working, stress management, self-control, realizing the needs of others, leadership, conflict management, decision making problem-solving, intercultural awareness, critical thinking, innovation, and creativity.

These groupings provide a clear framework for comprehending and nurturing soft skills which are increasingly valuable in innumerable aspects of life, including workplace and education.

Employer demands are well aligned with the taxonomy of soft skills by Dall'Amico (2016). The skills classified within three major areas help individuals to establish critical acquaintances between emotional and cognitive aspects, organizational abilities, ethics, communication skills, and initiative (Cinque, 2014).

It implies that for individuals to function properly in a workplace context these soft skills are necessary. The evolving role of teachers was emphasized by a OECD report in 2005. The four levels of teacher's responsibilities were delineated as 1) students level 2) classroom level 3) school level and 4) wider community level. These extended roles involve learning process, management and meeting and responding to student's needs at the individual level, addressing cross-curricular emphasis, integrating students with special needs, and teaching at a multicultural classroom level, at the school level it involves collaboration and team planning, systematic improvement and evaluation, using ICT in administrative and teaching tasks and shared leadership. At the community level, it involves providing professional advice to parents and establishing connections between the local community and the broader world. For teachers, it becomes mandatory to comprehend how these skills become tactically significant in their educational journeys. By doing this, teachers can concoct better students for success in the ever-sprouting professional landscapes where soft skills are increasingly valued by employers. In effective teaching soft skills are viewed as a decisive factor by school administrators (Peabody,2019).

In the context of the previous paragraph, soft skills must attain even additional significance in the workplace, especially in training and educational sets. Educators and trainers are called upon to enhance their soft skills to slant their profession in a unique way. This is mandatory to manage the teacher-student association in the context of instructive interaction. Through analysis of numerous studies and research fixated on the relation between teaching and soft skills, five skills have been identified as principally vital for educators. The skills are Communication, Problem Solving, Lifelong Learning, Team Group and Leadership (Altomari, N., & De Pietro, O. 2019). Development of these soft skills can endow teachers to outrival in their roles and enrich the educational experience for their pupils.

### **An Overview of the Dimensions of Teacher Performance Measurement**

As noted by Elger (2017) teachers' performance is a journey through multiple levels where teachers continually enhance learning and skill development

Don Elger, in 2017, introduced the Theory of Performance (ToP) at the University of Idaho. To perform, in the context of this theory, entails engaging in a multifaceted sequence of actions that draw upon a combination of skills and knowledge to yield valuable outcomes.

Various researches have been conducted related to job performance in recent past and different dimensions and approaches of measurement are used to ascertain job performance (Adeyemi, 2011; Duze, 2012; Johanim, 2010; Paracha et al., 2012; Pradeep & Prabhu, 2011; Salmiah, 2004; Thamrin, 2012). For example, Johanim (2010) used dimensions like organization citizenship behavior and task performance while other dimensions such as performance based on context, productivity counters and malpractice in organization was studied by (Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000) another study incorporated measures like task performance, unproductive work behavior, contextual performance and adaptive performance to ascertain work performance variables. In already mentioned dimensions, Fauzilah et al. (2011) incorporated training and experience as dimension of work performance measurement in his study. Salmiah (2004) used the dimensions of effectiveness and work efficiency, as introduced by Drucker (1999) to measure performance of knowledge workers in support agencies and professional groups involved in electronic pilot projects illustrate the diverse approaches and dimensions used to measure work performance in different settings.

In the education field several past studies have been conducted concerning teacher work performance (Adejumobi & Ojikutu, 2013; Adeyemi, 2011; Duze, 2012; Jay, 2014; Muhammad Amin et al., 2013; Nurul Hudani et al., 2013). For example, a study led by Muhammad Amin et al. (2013) uses dimensions such as teaching skills, management skills, discipline and regularity besides interpersonal relationships for teachers work performance measurement. Adediwura & Tayo (2007) extended these dimensions by compassing attitudes towards extensive knowledge and task on academic performance in the measurement of teacher performance. These studies show the diversity of dimensions and aspects considered in assessing teacher work performance within the context of education.

Adejumobi and Ojikutu (2013) employed five dimensions for determining teacher's work performance which include facility availability, teacher motivation, class size leadership style and confidence strategies while Sule (2013) ascertained that the relationship between principal leadership and teachers work performance affect demonstration strategies utilizing dimensions like discipline development, teaching ability, classroom and student assessment.

The variety of dimension considered by early researchers are highlighted in literature review in measuring teachers' work performance, however this study adopted the dimensions used by Muhammad Amin et al. (2013) which include teaching skills, management skills, discipline and frequency and interpersonal relationships, attitude towards tasks and extensive knowledge on academic performance.

## **Material and Methods**

The recent study is descriptive in nature and provides insight into the effect of soft skills on work performance of primary school teachers. The survey method was employed and the questionnaire was used to collect data. Descriptive and inferential analysis was done afterwards.

## Population

In this study the unit of analysis were teachers thus the population of this study was the entire male and female public primary school teachers (PSTs) teaching in total 2451 schools of elementary wing of all four tehsils of district Rahim Yar Khan.

## Sampling

In this study cluster random sampling technique was employed. A predefined portion of the sample was drawn in accordance with the population specifications. Since all school teachers were distributed in clusters naturally. The scope of study spans four sub divisions of district Rahim Yar Khan. The total numbers of schools in four subdivisions of the elementary wing of district Rahim Yar Khan were 2451. All the schools in these four subdivisions were the clusters of teachers working in each of the schools and the target sample of the teachers was selected from schools as clusters. 245 schools/clusters were selected on the basis of 10% sampling criteria from total population of schools, 10% male and female schools from total number of male and female schools/clusters in each tehsil were selected randomly as a sample. Total 245 schools were selected and all the PST teachers included in the clusters were considered as the unit of analysis or respondents.

## Research Tool

To measure soft skills of teachers a scale was adapted after formal permission from Orlando De Pietro (2019) which includes 5 subscales communication, leadership, teamwork, lifelong learning, and problem solving on 5 point Likert scale from 1 to 5, 1(not at all agreeable) to 5 (completely agreeable) and other evaluations (2, 3, and 4) for all intermediate cases. As scale was adapted several items were excluded and some were improved and revised which were best related to contextual requirements after consultation with experts. After adaptation 32 direct items which were selected based on five subscales of soft skills. The reliability coefficient alpha value for soft skills scale after adaptation was 0.93. To measure teachers' work performance the questionnaire "Teachers' job performance" was adopted by Amin et al. (2013). Four facets of teachers' performance scale were teaching skills, management skills, discipline and regularity, and interpersonal relations were included in the questionnaire on 5- point Likert scale of (1) never, (2) seldom, (3) sometime, (4) usually, and (5) always. The whole questionnaire contained 25 items. The reliability coefficient alpha value was 0.81 (Amin & Atta, 2013).

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1**  
**Soft Skills of Teachers**

Sr #	Statement	Level of Agr	1	2	3	4	5	Std.	Mean
1	Communication	F	56	61	178	251	294	0.782	3.792
		%	6.66	7.26	21.23	29.8	34.98		
2	Problem solving	F	28.26	37.71	125.14	282.9	366	0.820	4.095
		%	3.4	4.5	14.9	33.7	43.6		
3	Lifelong learning	F	35.14	38.6	96.86	280.2	389.14	0.854	4.130
		%	4.196	4.586	11.53	33.36	46.31		
4	Leadership	F	29.14	52.28	161.15	269.1	328.29	0.841	3.970
		%	3.49	6.228	19.142	32.04	39.1		
5	Team Work	F	20.4	49.2	151.2	249.6	369.6	0.866	4.07
		%	2.4	5.84	18	29.7	44.02		
Overall Scale								.7535	4.012

Table 1 presented teachers' responses about soft skills. Results indicated that about 65% of respondents responded that they are effective communicators. 78% of respondents responded that they are good problem solvers. About 79% of respondents responded that

they hold lifelong learning skills. About 71% of respondents responded that they own leadership qualities. About 74% of respondents responded that they maintain good teamwork. The overall mean score of 4.012 shows that the majority of teachers possess a considerable level of soft skills.

**Table 2**  
**Work Performance of Teachers**

Sr	Statement	Level of Agree	1	2	3	4	5	Std.	Mean
1	Teaching skills	F	18	18	65.14	275.14	463.72	.54058	4.367
		%	2.1	2.1	7.7	32.8	55.2		
2	Management skills	F	38.4	14.4	68.4	237.6	481.2	.62592	4.320
		%	4.56	1.7	8.14	28.3	57.28		
3	Discipline and regularity	F	12	8	23	171	626	.42992	4.656
		%	1.416	0.934	2.734	20.38	74.534		
4	Interpersonal relations	F	3.428	14.574	41.14	201.43	579.428	.50227	4.593
		%	0.4	1.716	4.95	23.971	68.971		
Overall Scale								4.368	4.484

Table 2 presents that about 88% respondents responded that they exhibit remarkable teaching skills. About 85% of respondents uphold good management skills. About 94% of respondents endorsed discipline and regularity. About 93% of respondents maintain good interpersonal relations. The overall mean score of 4.484 denotes that the majority of teachers exhibit excellent work performance.

**Table 3**  
**Level-wise effect of soft skills on teacher's work performance**

Level of Soft Skills	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	df	t-Value	P-value
Low	78	3.8850	.54839	.06209	820	-14.405	.000
High	744	4.5491	.36667	.01344			

Table 3 presents the results about the effect of soft skills on the work performance of teachers. It shows the substantial mean difference in the work performance of high-level soft skills (M=4.549, Sd=.367) and low-level soft skills (M=3.88, Sd=.548) of teachers. The level-wise effect of soft skills on the work performance of teachers also has a significant difference (df= 820, p<.000). The sig value (p<.000) demonstrated strong variance between groups and within groups. Mean results (Mean= 4.549) indicated that high levels of soft skills have a stronger effect on the work performance of teachers than low levels of soft skills.

**Table 4**  
**Relationship between Soft Skills and Teachers' Work Performance**

	Soft Skill	Teachers' work performance	Sig. (2 tailed)
1	Soft Skill	1	.503**
2	Teachers' work performance	.503**	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to analyze the strength and direction of the relationship between soft skills and teachers' work performance. Table 4 indicates that the correlation between the variables is positive and moderate. The correlation value is .503 showing that the increase in soft skills level has an amplified effect on teachers' work performance.

## Conclusions

Nearly two-thirds of respondents are effective communicators. More than three fourth respondents are good problem solvers. More than three of four respondents hold lifelong learning skills. Less than three-fourth of respondents have leadership qualities. Nearly three-fourth responded believe in teamwork. Studies showed that the majority of teachers possess remarkable soft skills. The positive perspective regarding soft skills was also generally maintained by participants (Streltsova & Ivanova 2020)

More than three fourths of respondents exhibit good teaching skills. More than three fourths of respondents uphold good management skills. The majority of respondents responded that they endorsed discipline and regularity. The majority of respondents maintain good interpersonal relations. Studies showed that the majority of teachers exhibit excellent work performance.

The level-wise effect of soft skills on the work performance of teachers also has a significant difference. Mean results indicated that high levels of soft skills have a stronger effect on the work performance of teachers than low levels of soft skills. Guzmán-Britto (2019) also recognized substantial differences in the soft skills of teachers in public educational institutes in a quantitative research study conducted in Peru.

The correlation coefficient between soft skills and teachers' work performance is 0.503. Pearson's  $r$  shows that there is a positive relationship with a moderate effect between soft skills and teachers' work performance. The positive  $r$  value indicates that the increase in the value of soft skills leads to an increase in the value of teachers' work performance. While significance value (.000) shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between soft Skills and teachers' work performance.

There was a positive correlation with a moderate effect between soft skills and teachers' work performance. Teachers with a high level of soft skills also had high work performance.

The research aimed to assess the association between teacher's soft skills and teacher's work performance. The research findings illuminate a compelling and positive relationship between teachers' soft skills and their work performance. Soft skills, encompassing attributes such as communication, problem-solving, lifelong learning, leadership, and teamwork emerge as significant predictors of teaching effectiveness. The ability to understand, empathize, and communicate effectively contributes to creating a conducive learning environment. Teachers with strong soft skills, as highlighted in the assessment items, are better equipped to establish positive teacher-student relationships, manage classroom dynamics, and foster a supportive atmosphere. The positive correlation observed suggests that educators possessing heightened levels of soft skills are more likely to excel in various facets of their work, including skills related to teaching and delivery of lessons, organizing and management of the class, regularity and discipline, and interpersonal relations. This orientation stresses the significance of identifying and nurturing soft skills in professional development initiatives and teacher training programs, ultimately supporting to heightened overall teacher performance and improved student outcomes. Streltsova and Ivanova (2020) stressed the purposeful efforts in Russia to foster the soft skills of teachers. In Colombia, a project focusing on the development of teachers' soft skills integration of a dedicated subject on soft skills across preschool to high school curricula was recommended (De Paniza, 2019). Streltsova and Ivanova (2020) emphasized the inevitability of purposeful efforts in Russia to cultivate the soft skills of teachers.

## Recommendations

In the light of the study and respondents, the following points are recommended;

Soft skills need to be emphasized and specific initiatives must be taken to develop these skills to boost teachers' work performance. Communication practices of teachers are encouraged to nurture effective communication skills to make their teaching and delivery of lessons effective. Specific mind exercises must be designed and executed in training programs for teachers to develop a problem-solving mindset to deal with challenges encountered by teachers. The holistic meaning of education and life must be known by teachers to embrace their commitment to lifelong learning to teach with influence and maintain discipline and regularity in students. Make them realize the importance of an individual, especially teachers, to make them able to flourish their leadership qualities which pave a path to lead their students and to make them future leaders too. Collaborative practices and teamwork execution must be emphasized by teachers to get augmented results. These proficiencies and skills are vital to enhance inclusive work performance in the education field.



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