
Analysis of Soft Skills among Secondary School Teachers in Rivers State

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Abstract

The ability to apply cognitive and psychomotor gains from classroom interaction to daily living should be embedded in teaching through the inclusion of soft skills in the taught curriculum. The population of the study consisted of all secondary school teachers in Rivers State. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 72 teachers. Rivers State of Nigeria is clustered along the existing three senatorial districts in the State. Two local government areas [LGAs] were randomly selected from each senatorial districts. Four schools were thereafter selected from each of the LGAs totaling twenty-four schools. Three teachers were randomly selected from each school. An instrument called Secondary Teachers' Soft Skills Assessment Scale (STSSAS) was constructed and validated by the researchers. Cronbach alpha was used to derive the reliability coefficient of 0.75. Two research questions and two hypotheses were answered and tested by the study. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The data were analyzed using Frequency counts, simple percentages and Independent t-test statistics. The study revealed that 23.6% of the teachers had low measure in soft skills while 76.4% possessed soft skills in higher level. The study recommended among others that various strategies should be put in place through training, retraining and workshops on soft skills for the secondary school teachers in order to realize the essence and objectives of secondary education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Soft skills, Gender, Teaching experience

INTRODUCTION

With the changing educational trends, versatility in educational courses, availability of masses of qualified personnel, the competition for job acquisition and job sustainability is becoming tougher. To get an edge over the competitors, students are left with no choice but to add values to their hard skills with soft skills to exhibit their true potential. Hard skills are academic skills, experience and level of expertise while soft skills are self-developed, interactive, communication, human and transferable skills. Literature suggests that hard skills contribute to only 15% of one's success while the remaining 85% is made by soft skills. Most employers these

days want to hire, retain and promote persons who are dependable, resourceful, ethical, self-directed, having effective communication, willing to work and learn and having positive attitude. Some of these skills sought after by employers include: interpersonal skills, team working, negotiating skills, communication skills, time management, and stress management among others. “Soft skills refer to the cluster of personality traits, social graces, facility with language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism that mark people to varying degrees. Soft skills complement hard skills, which are the technical requirements of a job.” (Wikipedia, 2007).

Soft skills are those personal attributes which enhance a person’s interaction with others, boost his learning and increase his overall productivity and make him function optimally (Asuru & Ogidi, 2013). Putting it in perspective, the concept of soft skills has a sociological origin and is related to emotional intelligence quotient. They are behavioural competencies, also called interpersonal skills or people’s skills (Obioma, Apeji, Omole, Aworanti, Opara & Adewumi 2013).

For these researchers, taxonomically, soft skills are made-up of;

➤ Communication skills	➤ Common knowledge
➤ Critical and structured thinking	➤ Responsibility
➤ Problem solving skills	➤ Etiquette and good manners
➤ Creativity	➤ Courtesy
➤ Teamwork capability	➤ Self-esteem
➤ Negotiating skills	➤ Sociability
➤ Self-management	➤ Integrity / Honesty
➤ Time management	➤ Empathy
➤ Conflict management	➤ Work ethic
➤ Cultural awareness	➤ Project management
	➤ Business management

However, to keep things simple, it is clear that we are looking at three very different skill categories, that is.

- Personal qualities,
- Interpersonal skills,
- Additional skills / knowledge.

After explaining much on soft skills, the answer to why they are considered as so important is still open. There are many reasons for having an in-depth look at a person’s soft skills. One outstanding reason is today’s job-market, which in many fields is becoming ever increasingly competitive. To be successful in this tough environment, candidates for jobs should bring along an “edge” that distinguishes them from other candidates with similar qualifications and evaluation results. And where do they find this competitive advantage? In additional knowledge and skills, added up by convincing personal traits and habits. This sounds familiar. Already during the job interview itself good communication skills are very important. They can even serve to successfully cover up weaknesses on the hard skills side. Don’t we all know colleagues

who are smooth talkers, but there is no action forthcoming from their side? Once employed, the success story of people who can master soft skills continues because of much better career opportunities. Simple fact, which can be seen in daily business life, is that employers prefer to promote staff members with better soft skills. Good hard skills alone are not enough anymore to be a first consideration when it comes to promotion. During the last ten years in many societies, the opinion on soft skills has changed considerably. Whereas in the past, the mastering of hard skills was rated first and soft skills were considered as secondary, the perception has changed. As said earlier, good communication skills can easily cover a lack in hard skills. Nowadays in general, people who are extroverts, good in marketing themselves and socialize easily are rated higher than others who lack those attributes. The good old technician who is introverted and talking less than ten complete sentences a day is no longer appreciated.

Soft skills have more to do with who people are than what they know. As such, they encompass the character traits that decide how well one interacts with others and usually are a definite part of an individual's personality. In a competitive labour market, employees who demonstrate that they have a good combination of hard and soft skills often see a greater demand for their services.

The Walker Center for Teaching and Learning re-emphasized that it is instructive to handle assessment at three broad-based levels;

- Assessing course related knowledge and skills.
- Assessing learners' attitudes, values and self-awareness.
- Assessing learners' reactions for instructions.

Asuru (2015) posits:

Assessment is broader than measurement. It is the process of organizing measurement data and fashioning them in an interpretable manner on the basis of which judgment (evaluation) could be made. It relates measurement data to identified standards and involves data comparison. Assessment involves a fact finding activity and enables the assessor describe the prevailing status of the learner within the context of a given educational objective. It entails gathering data from diverse sources in order to have a clearer understanding of the learner's attributes as a result of the learning encounter. The focus of assessment is to organize measurement data into an interpretable manner. For instance, organizing the student's scores (measurement data) from the various courses/and or domains for purposes of taking a decision (evaluation) about him. Assessment provides answers to such questions as:

- How well did the students perform this year? How did the male students perform in relation to the female students?
- How did the students in private schools perform in relation to those in public schools?
How did the students perform in Mathematics compared with English Language?

Assessment therefore describes the worth of pupils' behaviour, but fails to pass judgment.

Assessments have been described as either formative (assessment as and for learning) or summative (assessment of learning) and a clear demarcation has been drawn between them. Formative assessment, where the purpose is to assist learning, is most useful to individuals because they have time to make changes as a result of assessment, if necessary. Summative assessment, designed as a basis for summarizing and reporting achievement, presents information on achievement in a concise way that is of use to potential employers.

There are certainly instances where the distinction is clear. In high stakes academic assessments and in professional or trade licensing, summative assessment is the primary and perhaps only interest. Before candidates can be admitted to professional practice, licensing bodies must be assured that candidates have the knowledge and skills that are regarded as necessary. These assessments are summative only; licensing bodies are responsible primarily for ensuring that practitioners are competent.

Acquisition of soft skills enhances students' learning and makes the teacher's work somewhat simpler. Some of its role in teaching, learning and assessment as noted by Emeka (2006), are;

- Enabling students to concentrate on assigned task,
- Enabling students to work independently,
- Ensuring co-operation among learners
- Setting the tone on how learners will go about their learning,
- Enabling learners to prioritize tasks, adapt to new situations and challenges and boost self-confidence,
- Enabling learners to be original, resourceful and creative, and
- Enabling learners to express their needs in a way that builds bridges with others.

In the work place and the larger society, possession of soft skills by employees has been identified as a contributory factor to the success of any organization. This is because they enhance productivity in the work place, particularly those areas where the staff has regular direct contact with clients, hence, employers today emphasize on the possession of soft skills as opposed to hard skills (skills or ability to carry out certain tasks like actual moving of file from one point to the other, operate a computer and other motor as well as cognitive-based skills).

It has been advocated that soft skills be deliberately taught in schools. This could be done by appropriately developing the curriculum either as embedded/infused curriculum. As noted by Obioma, et al, an embedded or infused curriculum on soft skills is one where soft skills topics are embedded or infused into other school subjects, while stand – alone curriculum is one where independent subject on soft skills is developed and taught as such.

Purpose of the study

Generally, the purpose of the study is to examine the effectiveness of soft skills assessment among secondary school teachers in Rivers State. But more specifically, the purpose of the study

is to examine, among other things,

1. To determine how the quality of teacher-training affects the soft skills assessment by the secondary school teachers in Rivers State.
2. To assess the effect of soft skills on secondary school teachers in Rivers State base on gender.
3. To find out how previous experience can affect the assessment of soft skills by secondary school teachers in Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does the teacher-training affect soft skills assessment by secondary school teachers in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does the gender of the teacher affect the soft skills of secondary school teachers in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in soft skills assessment ability of secondary school teachers based on training.
2. There is no significant difference in soft skills assessment ability of secondary school teachers based on gender.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

An ex post facto research design type was adopted for the study as the researchers did not manipulate any of the independent variables.

Sampling and Sample

Multi-staged sampling procedures (clustered sampling) were used for the study. Rivers State of Nigeria is clustered along the existing three senatorial districts in the State. Two local government areas [LGAs] were randomly selected from each senatorial districts. Four schools were thereafter selected from each of the LGAs totalling twenty-four schools. Three teachers were randomly selected from each school. This gave a total of 72 teacher participants.

An instrument called Secondary Teachers' Soft Skills Assessment Scale (STSSAS) was constructed by the researchers. The instrument has two sections, A and B. Section A elicited demographic information of the respondents while section B contained 30 items on soft skills assessment of the respondents. The instrument was validated by administering it on 24 secondary school teachers who were not included in the sample. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was obtained using Cronbach alpha method with the reliability coefficient of 0.75. The final instrument was administered to 72 teachers and the resultant data was analyzed using frequency counts, simple percentages and independent t-test.

Results

	N	Mini mum	Maxi mum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I spend a lot of time listening to others	72	1.00	4.00	2.9444	.78523
I am willing to accept criticism and discuss about it	72	1.00	4.00	2.7778	1.11611
Exchange my ideas with other teachers	72	1.00	4.00	2.4444	.80297
I compare myself with the different point of views of other teachers	72	3.00	4.00	3.4306	.49863
At the end of a teaching period i do not always wonder if the learners understood what i said	72	1.00	3.00	1.7361	.78710
During a teaching activity I am pleased that questions are being asked about the topic I am explaining	72	3.00	4.00	3.3472	.47943
I use a clear and simple language	72	3.00	4.00	3.1944	.39855
I use a highly sought-after language with an uncommon terminology	72	1.00	3.00	1.7500	.68690
I am willing to help learners by going beyond the required commitment	72	1.00	4.00	2.4028	.88269
Sometimes I have difficulty understanding the intentions of the learners	72	3.00	4.00	3.2222	.41866
I avoid showing appreciation with gestures	72	2.00	4.00	3.0972	.44909
I don't waste time discussing problems that slow down the activities I set myself	72	1.00	2.00	1.2778	.45105
I interact with learners only during the time provided for in the day	72	1.00	2.00	1.4306	.49863
Select materials that reflect the different backgrounds and needs of the learners	72	3.00	4.00	3.4028	.49390
I try to predict what could happen before performing an activity	72	3.00	4.00	3.6389	.48369
I try to understand the causes of each problem	72	3.00	4.00	3.1944	.39855
Carefully compare different solutions to solve problems	72	3.00	4.00	3.5000	.50351
When I think of how to manage a problem, I resort to already known schemes	72	3.00	4.00	3.5278	.50273
To solve a problem situation it is necessary to intervene in the problem directly	72	1.00	3.00	1.4444	.66901
To solve a problem it is necessary to go back to the causes that produced it	72	1.00	2.00	1.3889	.49092
Participate in trainings that promote peace and understanding of cultural diversity	72	3.00	4.00	3.2639	.44383
Design learning activities that reflect the different backgrounds and needs of the learners	72	3.00	3.00	3.0000	.00000
Treat each learner as an individual deserving of respect and not as a representative of a group	72	3.00	4.00	3.3056	.46387
I prefer to use verbal language rather than gesture language	72	1.00	2.00	1.3889	.49092
Practice cooperative learning by encouraging cooperative learning tasks and discourage negative competition among learners	72	3.00	5.00	3.6250	.51560
Able to adapt any changes that may occur in the learning environment	72	3.00	4.00	3.2639	.44383
Utilize time and manage workload efficiently	72	1.00	4.00	1.9583	.65944
Establish commitment to learning as a lifelong process	72	2.00	4.00	3.1806	.45429
Reflect on past experiences in order to inform future progress	72	2.00	4.00	3.2778	.48126
Has the innate ability to inspire, energize and encourage the learners and everyone	72	4.00	4.00	4.0000	.00000
Valid N (listwise)	72				

Research Question 1: To what extent does the teacher-training affect soft skills assessment by secondary school teachers in Rivers State?

Table 1: Level of Soft Skills Possessed by Secondary School Teachers

Level of soft skills	Frequency	Percentage
Not Trained	17	23.6%
Trained	55	76.4%

The level of possession of soft skills of secondary school teachers is indicated in table 1 above. It is indicated in the table that 23.6% of the secondary teachers possessed low level of soft skills while 76.4% possessed high level of soft skills. It can be observed from the table that greater number of secondary teachers possessed high soft skills while a very few possessed low level of soft skills.

Research Question 2: To what extent does the gender of the teacher affect the soft skills of secondary school teachers in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean Performance and Standard Deviation of Secondary School Teachers Based on Gender

Group	N	X	SD	Mean Difference
Males	36	84.0556	3.56927	1.2778
Females	36	82.7778	3.46502	

The results in table 2, indicates that the mean for males was 84.0556 (SD = 3.56927), while the mean for females was 82.7778 (SD = 3.46502), indicating a mean difference of 1.2778. This result indicates that the mean performance of male secondary school teachers on soft skills was higher than the mean performance of female secondary school teachers in Rivers State.

Testing Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in soft skills assessment ability of secondary school teachers based on training.

Table 3: Result of t-test on the analysis of Soft Skills Assessment Ability of Secondary School Teachers Based on Training

Soft skill training	N	X	SD	%	t-value	Df	p-value	Decision
Not trained	17	83.1765	3.48632	23.6	0.323	70	0.041	Rejected
Trained	55	83.4909	3.59976	76.4				

From the table above, it shows that the secondary school teachers not trained on soft skills are 17 which is 23.6% and the mean is 83.1765 while the number of those trained is 55 which is 76.4% and a mean of 83.4909. The results suggest that there are more trained secondary school teachers with soft skills ability than those not trained. Furthermore, a t-value of 0.323 was obtained with a p-value of 0.041 which is less than 0.05 significance level. This implies that there is a

significant difference in soft skills assessment ability of secondary school teachers based on their level of training.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in soft skills assessment ability of secondary school teachers based on gender.

Table 4: Result of t-test analysis of soft skills assessment ability of secondary school teachers based on gender

Group	N	X	SD	t-value	Df	p-value	Decision
Males	36	84.0556	3.56927	1.541	70	0.126	Accepted
Females	36	82.7778	3.46502				

After analysis of data, it was shown that males had a mean of 84.0556 while females had a mean of 82.7778. These results suggest that more male teachers have soft skills ability than female teachers. However, a t-value of 1.541 was obtained and a sig value of 0.126 which is greater than 0.05 significance level, which implies that there is no significant difference in soft skills assessment ability of male and female secondary school teachers.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study showed that the level of possession of soft skills by secondary teachers is generally high. This has a lot of implications as it has been argued that soft skills should be developed in students right from their early childhood stage. If this is to be achieved; teachers who are expected to inculcate such skills must possess the skills in right proportion.

Similarly, the finding showed no significant difference in soft skills score of male and female teachers. This means that adequate possession of soft skills is irrespective of whether a teacher is a male or female. It does not mean that because a teacher is a male makes him better in soft skills than his female counterpart, neither it is because a teacher is a female makes her possess higher skills than her male colleagues. Likewise, the findings showed significant difference on the level of possession of secondary school teachers on soft skills. This finding supports the finding of the study carried out by Onyekuru and Ibegunam (2013) who discovered that sex had no significant influence on teaching effectiveness which could be necessary possible without adequate possession of soft skills. The study of Akpan (1996) also corroborated the finding this study, he found in his study that gender and school type did not related significantly with the teaching effectiveness skill of the teachers.

CONCLUSION

Soft skills assessment is a new and as yet underdeveloped domain. Several factors are interwoven, including the ill definitions of soft skills, the different environment in which soft skills are developed, the intermix of their teaching and assessment with traditional subjects and the lack of a theory that explains their acquisition and development. Additionally, the soft skills

assessment design should suite the individual characteristics of each institution and workplace. Several challenges are lie ahead than need to be addressed.

It is also evident that teacher training plays a prominent role in the preparation of the teacher towards the assessment of soft skills in the practice of teaching.

We recommend that the teaching of soft skills and their assessment should be part of the teacher training curriculum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Consequent upon the findings and conclusion in the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There should be a National Education Policy on training of Teachers on how to teach and assess soft skills at all levels of education.
2. The gender, teaching experience and school location are not factors to be considered when evaluating the teachers' soft skills.
3. Strategies for improving teachers' soft skills should be put in place, in form of participation in activities such as workshops, seminar and trainings with a view to improving their skills.
4. Government should ensure the provision of standardized soft skills assessment instruments.
5. There should also be an integration of the three domains in students assessment and as well in taking decisions about students.

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