Soft Skills, Personality, and Work Motivation of Secondary School Teachers: A Review of Related Literature

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Abstract- The definition of effective teaching in 21st-century high school environments has evolved away from solely what teachers know (pedagogical content knowledge) toward an increasingly sophisticated definition that now includes various "soft skills," or interpersonal, emotional, and cognitive competencies. This literature review serves to explore the triadic relationship between teachers' soft skills, personality traits, and work motivation in the secondary school context. Although a significant portion of this review is built from empirical research conducted in India, including Bi and Sareen (2018) and Sharma, Sharma, Jain, and Sharma (2022), the contents of this literature review are synthesized from a broad range of international research, in order to provide an integrated framework for understanding how personality dispositions and motivation workplaces will enable teachers to develop and employ soft skills. The synthesis of all of the empirical studies indicates that soft skills cannot be viewed in isolation; rather, soft skills are an integral part of a teacher's psychological profile. Specifically, the synthesis demonstrates that personality traits such as conscientiousness and extraversion serve as behavioural anchors for the development and application of soft skills. Additionally, the intrinsic drive for work motivation serves as a catalyst for teachers to deploy soft skills. The literature review concludes with three key areas of teacher effectiveness in the secondary school, specifically communication, emotional intelligence, and adaptability.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Secondary Education, Teacher Personality, Work Motivation, Job Satisfaction, Teaching Effectiveness

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, the educational research paradigm has changed from a focus on teacher knowledge to one based on teacher behavior and disposition. Teacher knowledge of their subject matter will always be a requirement, but according to today's educational theories, much of the difference in effectiveness of a good teacher versus a superior teacher is often in the realm of "soft skills." Secondary teachers, especially those instructing students during the tumultuous period of adolescence, use numerous "soft skills" such as emotional regulation, conflict resolution, persuasive communication, and leadership as tools in their profession. Despite the officials' acknowledgement of the importance of soft skills, most often they are not incorporated into the psychologist of the teacher's overall mental process. This review of the literature indicates that a full understanding of the construct of soft skills for teachers will require an examination using personality theory and motivational theory as the basis for this understanding.

Soft skills are best described as the collective personality traits, social graces, communication skills, language, personal habits, friendliness, and optimism exhibited in relationships with others. "Hard skills" are technical and measurable; in contrast, soft skills are not easily defined or measured and are situational by nature. The complexity of soft skills has made it difficult to accurately measure soft skills in education, creating a demand for research studies specific to the unique context of the secondary school environment.

The paper reviews extant literature across three interrelated domains to establish a sound theoretical foundation for this understanding. It has, first, analyzed the nature of soft skills in teaching by identifying the core competencies required of secondary educators. Second, it examines the role of personality, which, through stable individual differences, fundamentally shapes a teacher's capacity to develop and demonstrate these skills. Third, it has probed into work motivation as a dynamic force that controls the intensity and persistence of utilization of soft skills. Special attention is paid to the context of

Indian education, locating the theoretical discussion in empirical reality through two pivotal studies: Naheed Bi and Sareen (2018) and Sharma et al. (2022). By synthesizing the diverse strands of research, the review offers a comprehensive analysis of the "soft" side of teaching effectiveness.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE SOFT SKILLS CONSTRUCT IN SECONDARY EDUCATION

Defining Soft Skills for Teachers

In Educational literature, historically, the definition of soft skills has not been clearly defined; rather, soft skills were previously thought of as a catch-all term for all non-Cognitive skills. However, since the 1980s, scholars have begun developing clearer definitions for soft skills. For example, in the context of Secondary education, Tang et al. (2020) refer to soft skills as "the competencies to enable one to use their technical knowledge in a productive manner, both working with themselves and others." This description highlights the instrumental role of soft skills in enabling the transfer of educational content to students.

One of the most important pieces of literature on soft skills is the review article by Cinque (2016) which provides a model for thinking about soft skills in education. In this article, he identifies three key domains of soft skills: 1) Cognitive soft skills (critical thinking, problem-solving), 2) Emotional soft skills (empathy, emotional regulation), and 3) Social skills (communication, teamwork). For secondary educators, social and emotional skills are critical. Secondary school students have many needs at this stage of their development; therefore, students need to have teachers who can not only communicate concepts clearly but also understand and respond to the emotional challenges that exist for this age group and help manage the diverse classroom dynamics that develop within the high school setting.

The Necessity of Soft Skills in the Secondary Classroom

The unique nature of secondary school environments means that they create unique challenges for teachers who must possess different soft skills than those taught in primary schools, which focused primarily on nurturing and instilling basic literacy skills. Secondary education requires significant engagement with content from various subject areas as well as managing the behaviour of adolescent students. According to Heckman and Kautz (2012), the non-cognitive skills of teachers can predict student outcomes to a degree that is comparable with or greater than their cognitive (knowledge-based) abilities.

In India, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has placed emphasis on teachers possessing "21st-century skills," which are viewed as synonymous with soft skills. Teachers are expected to be "facilitators of learning" instead of simply being information transmitters. This expectation requires teachers to be adaptable and use creative problem-solving as well as interpersonal skills that are highly developed. This perspective is aligned with global trends. For example, the OECD Teaching and Learning Surveys have continually indicated that teachers who have high self-efficacy regarding student engagement and classroom management both rooted in soft skills report higher levels of job satisfaction and lower rates of teacher burnout.

Challenges in Measurement

A major gap within research literature seems to be a deficit of measurement methodologies that take into consideration the specific context of the measurement. Many of the current available tools for measuring soft skills to support teaching are generalised corporate measurement tools or broad personality assessments (Schulz, 2008); neither of which accurately reflect the many different layers (aspects) of the teaching profession. For instance, Schulz (2008) points out the disparity between how 'communication' is defined for corporate managers—primarily referring to the manager's ability to articulate and delivery messages clearly via verbal & written means vs. how it is defined for educators—i.e. as requiring the educator's to also understand how students interpret non-verbal cues and their ability to scaffold ideas for students who are using an entirely different logic process than they do, provide constructive feedback, etc. As indicated, there is a disparity between measurement practices used for soft skills with corporate employees and those used specifically for secondary school teachers, which further highlights the need for greater research to develop a set of soft skill measures that are precise for

secondary school teachers. To do so, it is essential to move beyond generic terminology and create measures that include very specific behaviours needed by secondary schoolteachers during different contexts (e.g. 'active listening' and 'adaptability').

III. PERSONALITY AS THE ANTECEDENT OF SOFT SKILLS

The "Big Five" and Teacher Behavior
Behavioural manifestations of competence are recorded as soft skills, while the latent structures giving rise to these behaviours are represented by personality traits. The Five-Factor Model (FFM), otherwise known as the Big Five Personality Traits, is a structure that has dominated the study of teachers' personality, consisting of: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Recent meta-analyses conducted by Kim, Jörg, and Klassen (2019) on the teacher personality-teacher effectiveness relationship yielded statistically significant correlations between a range of teacher effectiveness behaviours and specific teacher personality traits. Kim et al. found that a high level of conscientiousness (organisation, dependability, and goal directedness) serves as a significant predictor of a teacher's ability to plan lessons, manage time, and maintain orderly classrooms. All of these qualities are indicative of soft skills that relate directly to an individual's ability to self-manage, and teachers high in conscientiousness will be better suited to the "planning and organising" dimensions of soft skills. Extraversion and Agreeableness are essential to the interpersonal dimensions of teaching. Results from a meta-analysis conducted by Kim et al., indicate that teachers who are extraverted tend to have more energy and excitement for the job through working with people. As such, extraverted teachers are more likely to use high levels of verbal communication and enthusiasm in their teaching. Agreeableness encompasses several traits that serve as the foundation for empathy and rapport-building, such as trust, altruism, and kindness; therefore, they will also provide a teacher with an increased ability to build effective relationships with students and colleagues.. A study by Perera, Granziera, and McIlveen (2018) found that teacher agreeableness was a significant positive predictor of student-teacher relationship quality, a key soft skill outcome.

Personality Profiles of Indian Teachers
Sharma and colleagues (2022) explored the personality traits that shape teacher trainees' view of teaching, providing insight into how gender and other individual characteristics affect prospective educators' views.

The authors found distinct attitudes among males and females regarding their development in the teaching profession. Females are generally more likely to show intrinsic motivation for contributing to society, which relates to a higher score on the Agreeable personality trait, while males tend to take more of an instrumental approach towards the profession.

This represents a critical starting point for understanding how soft-skills development may be influenced by gender-based socialization patterns, as female teachers in Indian society may be predisposed to exhibiting empathy, warmth, and supporting those around them, resulting in a soft-skills profile weighted towards nurturing attributes. On the other hand, males may require additional development in these areas or may have a natural tendency to excel in more authoritarian or leadership-oriented skills.

IV. WORK MOTIVATION: THE ENGINE OF SKILL UTILIZATION

Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation in Teaching
Even if a teacher has the right personality traits for teaching and possesses the necessary soft skills, without the motivation to utilize those skills, the teacher's potential remains latent. Lehrer suggests that work motivation regulates the ability of the teacher to turn on his or her potential in the form of professional behaviour. Deci and Ryan (2000), using Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a framework, classify two major categories of motivation: intrinsic motivation (motivation resulting from the activity itself) and extrinsic motivation (motivation based on an outcome separate from the activity).

Research indicates that teachers are motivated primarily by intrinsic motivation. Teachers who find satisfaction in helping others learn are motivated to expend additional energy enabling them to create and utilise complex soft skills. Klassen and Tze (2014) stated that motivation is a stronger predictor of

"teacher engagement" than personality. Conversely, if a teacher is not motivated, it is likely he or she will use a one-dimensional approach, whereas a motivated teacher will devote emotional and cognitive energy to reach and connect with all learners.

Job Satisfaction and Motivation in the Indian Context
Naheed Bi & Sareen (2018) provided a comprehensive analysis of how the work environment, motivation, and job satisfaction are intertwined in India, in their publication "Study of Job Satisfaction Among Women Employees Working in Government and Non-Government Office". The authors presented significant contextual components related to motivation and analysed the relationship of the female demographic working in both government and non-government sectors.

According to the authors, job security and work-life balance rank high in Employer Motivators for those female workers in Government sectors, while the women in the Private sector relied more heavily upon Career Advancement and Competing with Others as Employer Motivators, however their reported level of Job Satisfaction for Stability was lower than those females in Government.

This report gives valuable insight into how Soft Skills are understood in the context of Indian Schools. Teachers employed at Government Schools have a high level of Job Security, thus it could be assumed that they will reach a "motivation plateau" when they no longer feel accountable by External Measures and therefore will lack Innovative drive towards further development of their Interpersonal Skills. In contrast, it could be assumed that Private School Teachers may have a great desire to present themselves as offering "Customer Service" towards parents through use of Soft Skills (e.g., polite behaviour with parents; Rapid Responses); however, they may also be at risk for developing Burnout (as indicated by the authors' findings).

This work essentially maps the "ecosystem" in which soft skills are practiced. It suggests that work motivation is not just an internal psychological state but a response to organizational structures. Therefore, any research on teacher soft skills should account for the type of institution (government vs. private) and the associated motivational climate. A teacher's failure to display "patience" (a soft skill) might not be a skill deficit, but a symptom of burnout caused by poor work-life balance.

The Motivation-Skill-Performance Link
Integrating these concepts, recent international research suggests a mediation model: Personality traits influence the *ease* of acquiring soft skills, but Work Motivation determines the *frequency* of their use. A study by Ngadiman and Ratmawati (2022) found a direct, positive influence of both soft skills and work motivation on teacher performance. This suggests that a teacher's final output is a product of both their skill level and their drive to apply those skills.

V.   SYNTHESIS: THE INTERPLAY OF SOFT SKILLS, PERSONALITY, AND MOTIVATION

According to the literature review, there is complexity in the triadic relationship between personality, soft skills, and motivation. Personality is an indicator of soft skills competence and motivation provides the drive for using these soft skill competencies.
1. Conscientiousness & Soft Skills- Kim et al. (2019) confirmed that teachers who score high on conscientiousness are more likely to excel at organizational/planning soft skills. However, these soft skills may not be expressed effectively in a teacher's classroom without intrinsic motivation. The teacher may exhibit rigidly bureaucratic behaviour instead of effectively managing their classroom.
2. Agreeableness & Soft Skills- An empathetic disposition is characteristic of teachers who score high on agreeableness. However, Sharma et al. (2022) propose that each teacher's attitude about their profession moderates their empathy. For example, teachers who score high on agreeableness but have a negative perception of the "low status" of teaching (due to motivational barriers), may suppress their natural empathy to project a "tough" persona, which results in underutilisation of their soft skills.
3. Job Satisfaction as a Moderator- Naheed Bi and Sareen (2018) stated that job satisfaction filters the way a teacher uses both technical and relational soft skills. For example, if a teacher does not feel adequately compensated and is dissatisfied with their employment conditions, they may withdraw socially

regardless of having high communication skill levels or extroverted personalities, resulting in the teacher performing minimum levels of technical work and neglecting the relationships with colleagues and students that are encompassed within the concept of soft skills.

Analytical Implications

Based on this synthesis, any analysis of teacher effectiveness should be multidimensional. It should not merely assess skills in isolation. Instead, a more robust model would capture:

- Skill Proficiency: The ability to execute a soft skill, such as calming an angry student.
- Behavioral Frequency: The actual application of a skill, such as frequently using humor to diffuse tension.
- Motivational Context: The underlying drive to use a skill, such as feeling motivated to understand students' personal backgrounds.

VI. GAPS IN EXISTING LITERATURE

While these three variables have been extensively studied separately, there has been little research examining all three variables together, especially in Indian secondary schools.

- Gap 1: Integrated Models on Personality, Motivation and Resourcefulness in relation to their contribution as a means of establishing "Soft Skill Use," on a continuum from Personality => Performance to Motivation => Satisfaction to an Integrated Methodology to establish Personality + Motivation => Soft Skill Use.
- Gap 2: Culturally Relevant Research on Soft Skills - Schulz (2008) pointed out that Western tools for assessing soft skills tend to emphasize assertiveness and individual leadership, which may not apply to the Indian "Guru-Shishya" (Teacher-Student) relationship where mutual respect and harmony are the key values. There is a need for further research on how to define and measure soft skills based on the Indian cultural context.
- Gap 3: Educational Sector Differences - Although Naheed Bi & Sareen (2018) examined the differences between public and private school teachers' job satisfaction, there has been little research on whether the profiles of the soft skills

needed by public and private school teachers differ. Do public school teachers require different types of conflict-resolution skills than elite private school teachers?

VII. CONCLUSION

According to the literature, the term "soft skills" for secondary school teachers can be understood as professional capabilities that can be described, cultivated, and assessed, rather than just being descriptors of someone's personality. Additionally, soft skills are not isolated from other aspects of an individual's personality; they rely on a person's personality (e.g., conscientiousness and agreeableness) and work-related motivations to develop and sustain them.

The current empirical research from Naheed Bi and Sareen's (2018) and Sharma and colleagues' (2022) seminal Indian studies suggests that a teacher's "soft" side is significantly determined by how the teacher views their gender role, the degree of job satisfaction, and the organization's surrounding environment/atmosphere. Therefore, a teacher with a high degree of job satisfaction and an intrinsic professional approach to work will be more likely to listen to, sympathize with, and lead their students.

In summary, in order to develop more effective teachers, it is important to understand the relationship between teacher personality traits, their level of motivation, and the "soft skills" they use on a day-to-day basis. More specifically, this means that both teacher selection and teacher-related work motivation must be considered when evaluating and developing effective teachers. Future research should continue to explore these relationships in detail by designing quality studies that examine the use of "soft skills" by teachers in their daily practice as well as how the acquisition of such skills is influenced by individual differences in teacher personality and work motivation.

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