

ENHANCING SOFT SKILLS IN STUDENT TEACHERS THROUGH B. ED INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

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Introduction

NEP 2020 aims to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal 4(SDGs) that focuses on lifelong learning opportunities while ensuring quality education that is both inclusive and equitable. In addition to this, the evolving global world has made it necessary for students to be able to think on their feet. Higher order thinking and soft skills are becoming a basic requirement for functioning in the world. Thus pedagogy must develop alongside to ensure the development of thinking and social and soft skills through education. As NEP 2020 sees teachers as an integral part of these reforms in the education system, it is crucial that teachers are prepared for this role. In order to develop students for the future, teachers must be able to model the necessary skills. Moreover, the nature of the profession is such that teachers must possess soft skills in order to be effective educators.

Soft skills refer to those skills that exemplify our individual traits and behaviour. They go beyond technical skills. These skills are found to be more important for employability but often are not easily visible though only a resume or one's qualifications. Soft skills include communication, problem-solving, time management, teamwork, leadership, flexibility and interpersonal skills. All of these are basic skills for teachers and can make a world of a difference to a teacher's individual classroom as well as their professional careers as a whole. In a study on the role of emotional intelligence and effective teaching, school administrators explained that soft skills were a crucial component of effective teaching and stressed on the significance of the student teacher rapport and relationships which included teachers high levels of interpersonal, communication, leadership dealing with their own as well as students' emotions for the benefit of student learning (Peabody, 2019).

The B.Ed program has been designed to develop the required knowledge, attitudes and skills in student teachers for their future careers as school teachers and leaders. The one year B.Ed was extended to two years to incorporate longer periods of experiential practice through multiple internships across the various semesters. Through the internship program student teachers are given an immersive experience of their future careers. It is a form of apprenticeship

where student teachers shadow school teachers and are provided with opportunities to perform school activities. These learning experiences help the students develop several soft skills in addition to classroom management and teaching skills. Some of the skills include communication, problem solving, teamwork, leadership, flexibility, work ethic as well as interpersonal skills which are all important for their internship. Whether they are explicitly aware of it at the time, or not, all internship activities force them into situations that demand the use and development of soft skills.

Methods and Sample

This study used a survey method with a total of 20 questions. 4 out of the 20 questions were open ended. A google form questionnaire was used to obtain data from 97 current F.Y.B.Ed students who completed a four week internship as part of their second semester in July/August 2022. The survey instrument was a feedback form which measured pre-service teachers' perceptions of their personal development of selected 21st-century skills through the internship program. A 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 5 (to a large extent) to 1 (to a small extent) measured student teachers' responses. For 4 statements regarding practice teaching planning matters of the internship students responded to Yes, No, Somewhat. The survey responses were analyzed using basic statistics, which generated percentages of preservice teachers' responses. Coding for the 4 open ended questions was done and pattern analyzed and results concluded.

Findings and Discussion

70.1% students responded that the internship program helped in enhancing their communication skills to a large extent. 29.9% responded to pointers 3 and 4. 74.2% students felt that the internship helped enhance their skills of communication and cooperation to a great extent. 25.8% responded to pointers 3 and 4. 69.1% of the students responded that the internship helped them enhance their self direction and individuals planning abilities to a great extent. 31% responded to points 3 and 4. 61.9% of the students responded that their academic ability improved to a great extent on account of the internship program. 37.2% responded to pointers 3 and 4. 1 % of the students responded to pointer 2, closer to a little extent. 69.1% of the students responded that the internship helped them improve their creativity and thinking skills to a great extent. 30.9% of the students responded to pointers 3 and 4. 82.5% of the students responded that their practicing teaching lesson presentation skills improved to a great extent. 17.5% of the students responded to pointers 3 and 4. 70.1% of the students responded that the internship helped enhance their Co Curricular Activity Planning Skills to a great extent. 29.9% of the students responded to pointers 3 and 4. 69.1% of the students felt that the school teacher observations helped them learn more about teaching and the school system. 80.4% of the students responded positively to their overall experience of the internship. 19.6% of the students responded to pointers 3 and 4. 99% of the students responded that they experienced support from the school to a large extent, 1% responded to pointer 3. 99% of the students responded that they received support to a large extent from their B.Ed college. 1% responded to pointer 3. 97.9% of the students responded that they received constructive feedback for the lessons they taught. 99% of the students responded that they received an orientation about the internship. 97.9% of the students observed the school teachers' lessons. While 1 % of students responded no and somewhat to the same. 95.9% of the students responded that their

experiences of proxy periods in the school helped improve their classroom management skills. 4.1% of the students responded somewhat to the same.

Across students' responses the theme that emerged was an enhancement of important skills required for a teacher. These included both specifically skills for teaching as well as soft skills of communication, problem solving, teamwork, leadership, flexibility, work ethic and interpersonal skills. Several students also reported an increase in their confidence levels. Students responded that the internship helped them develop their collaborative, communication, team work, critical thinking, problem solving, planning, time management, creativity, public speaking, classroom management, confidence and leadership skills.

Majority of the students responded that there wasn't anything specific that they didn't like about the internship. Most had a great learning experience. Students' responses related mostly to logistical and school constraints which they seemed unprepared for.

Conclusion

The revised two year B.Ed program includes extended internships giving students an extended amount of time spent in schools. This provides them with an opportunity to plan lessons, organize school activities, observe the school teachers, gain feedback on their own teaching from their college professors and implement their new learnings in school with students in their subject practice teaching lessons, proxy lessons and cocurricular activities. This constant interaction with the school students gives student teachers practice of several softs kills like communication, problem-solving, time management, teamwork, leadership, flexibility and interpersonal skills. Thus we see how experiential learning leads to competency development.

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