



**THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERPERSONAL
SKILLS FOR STUDENTS AND THE ROLE OF
UNIVERSITIES IN DEVELOPING THE SAME**

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ABSTRACT

Interpersonal skill is one of the most important soft skills and that is the focal point of this research. Universities play a major role in shaping up adults. This checks whether interpersonal skills make a difference to the university environment and if so in what ways. Are the universities focusing on other aspects rather than just hard skills? The various aspects and components that develop interpersonal skills will be studied and also target the different needs of different students. Universities play a huge role in creating social change by developing skilled and stable adults and their roles will be analyzed.

Keywords: Interpersonal Skills; Communication; Teamwork; Productivity; Emotional Intelligence

1. INTRODUCTION

The skills that are used to interact with people around us are called interpersonal skills. That is person-to-person skills. There are multiple theories on interpersonal skills and few prominent ones have been taken up. Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese's uncertainty theory developed in 1975 and William Schutz's FIRO(b) have been discussed. Various theories indicate the importance of interpersonal skills. This paper conceptualizes higher education's contributions in the development of this essential skill. It yet again emphasizes their importance, particularly in the lives of students, and how universities can play a major role. It focuses on widening the responsibilities of the educational institutions and presents an argument on not only to produce graduates with excellent technical skills and knowledge of their respective fields but also skills that will help them adapt and grow at their workplace; skills which will make them happy and satisfied individuals both personally and professionally. And forming great relationships through good interpersonal skills is one of them. The focus also will be on helping understand how can one better at these skills.

Communication plays a very important part in this as that is the way humans communicate their feelings, thoughts, and knowledge (Salas & Alexander, 2008). It is integral to human existence. Living without communication is impossible. Humans live to exist in a community. As social beings, people are bound and connected by communication. Factually we do live in relationships and communities. It's in figuring out how to best honor those people and help those communities and values that treat humanity with love and respect to win that we find

purpose, meaning, and ultimately impact. And communication is not only about being an effective speaker but also a good listener. Students who have good interpersonal skills generally have a successful life both personally and professionally.

Making the students understand the importance of connecting with people is critical in today's world which is shrinking into the mobile world. The importance of hard skills cannot be undermined but it will also not be wise to ignore the soft skills as these skills create a congenial environment for a person to work without stress. With an increase in the use of technology, the interaction and thus relationships amongst students have reduced. With the latest mobiles being mini-computers, people are always connected to the digital world and hence no need to connect with others is felt. What one has to realize that technology can lead to advancement but in no way to character building. The world has become a fingerprint one and more communication is done through fingers. People are being separated from others and the environment because of technology. There is hardly any face-to-face interaction and technology has made people fake. As human beings, the basic nature is to thrive on emotions. The head-down posture is constantly witnessed as people are busy on their devices. Agreed a lot of innovations and creativity have been unleashed but somewhere a lot of creativity also has been killed. People look up to google etc. for assistance without even trying to use their brains or talent. It is like strong perfect people walking on crutches.

The students of today have taken birth in a computer world. Armed with technology and access to the internet, these students haven't had time for developing face-to-face

communication, friendships. It has also been noticed that the writing skills are getting poorer day by day. Online chats and texting are what the youngsters have been resorting to and though these are good for instant communication, somewhere the basic ethos of communication has been killed. This is also one of the reasons that they become impatient and dissatisfied and hence change jobs frequently. Mobiles are socially isolating students and hence when it comes to teamwork, a lot are uncomfortable. Social interaction can never be replaced by machines. Computers can perform highly complex work but can't solve unforeseen problems. People however are tuned to deal with obstacles and can excel in solving issues if they have the right skills.

The young are getting addicted to computers and mobiles, are falling short in the quality of understanding others, and lack adaptability. A great role is played by the educational institutions which play a crucial part in the development of a student. At the university where the students enjoy a lot of freedom with their devices, encouraging peer-to-peer interaction should be one of the primary goals. This interaction can create a dynamic social network which can be beneficial to the individual and society as a whole and educational institutions play a crucial role in maintaining the social fabric.

For any organization, the importance of interpersonal skills cannot be overruled. When there is undue pressure, soft skills can always come to the rescue. So, imbibing these skills from a young age can prove to be beneficial. Good interpersonal or social skills are high in demand in the job market (MacLeod, 2016). People with these skills can collaborate effectively and there are fewer conflicts. With good interpersonal skills, one can collaborate without much difficulty, approach easily the

right person for the right job, and of course be available for others too.

This conceptual paper discusses and analyses the importance of interpersonal skills vis-a-vis the young adults, the components, and the gaps in the Indian education system. The paper is divided into different sections describing the need and components of interpersonal skills, and the gaps that need to be addressed.

2. OBJECTIVE

The study wants -

- a) To understand how success in professional and personal life is directly proportional to interpersonal skills.
- b) To know the various components of interpersonal skills and how they can be developed.
- c) To understand the gaps that the university education and real-life scenario have and how these can be filled.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 The link between interpersonal skills and professional life

As mentioned earlier good interpersonal skills are in demand in the job market. Employers want people good at building connections as this helps in business growth. A person with these skills is approachable, pleasant and well-liked. At a time when companies are vying with each other for a larger customer base, these skills can be helpful. Knowledge and expertise are required but good interpersonal skills can take an organization far. Research has shown that most of workplace problems arise because of poor interpersonal skills. It can be in form of distrust, conflicts, frequent altercations with coworkers or superiors, or even the loss of a job. Good and open communication can develop understanding,

which in turn can lead to empathy. With empathy, one starts seeing things from others' perspectives too which makes them flexible and open-minded. Knowledge of the organization and people help in better understanding and results. One gains knowing when one should be quiet and accepting and when to be vocal and contributing. This leads to lesser conflicts too. Lesser conflicts make the organization a better place to work. Happy employees and customers can be critical to the success of a business. And the sooner this behavior is learned, the easier life is. Also, one needs to understand that the organization has certain visions and goals. Organizations want employees to align themselves to these goals. So along with individual performance, the focus has to be on team performance too. Hence cooperation is required. Without it, working can be unpleasant and harm both the individual and the organization.

3.2 Components of Interpersonal Skills

Communication: Forming strong relationships is important as they can change the world. And to form good relationships, communication plays an important role. Employers are looking for people who are effective communicators, constantly interact with team members, and build positive work relationships. Healthy relationships are formed when one knows when what and how to speak. Words have the power to build or destroy relationships. Sometimes even well-meaning words can be misunderstood if the psycho-emotional state of the other person is fragile. Various interpretations can be drawn. So, contemplating and choosing the right words at the right moment is essential. Also, along with the right choice of words, our tone, body language if aligned well can create an honest exchange. It results in more understanding and lesser conflicts. With increasing diversity in today's workforce, constant communication is

imperative and helps one in understanding the beliefs, emotions, preferences, and style of others and by doing so, adapting to the speaker becomes easier. It is beneficial for the students to understand from an early stage that people are unique in their personalities and customizing their communication is the right way to create a happier atmosphere. Open communication lessens the chance of misunderstandings. People perceive things in their different ways and in not being open can lead to a lot of resentment. A person may be upset about something without the others even having a clue. So, when one indulges in open communication, expectations are clear and result in transparency. Transparency will always lead to trust which will, in turn, result in happier and productive employees. And trust is not only crucial in professional life but also in personal life. Students should realize that healthy relationship can be healing. Good interpersonal skills can make the students feel confident and improve their resilience and self-worth. Close connections lead to happier and contented people. Interpersonal skills can help form connections with family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and all of these help in our wellbeing. We draw strength from people around us. Man is a social animal and loneliness can be killing. Hence building, nurturing, and regularly invigorating these relationships is necessary. *Chris Sergin*, who has authored a chapter "Depressive Disorders and Interpersonal Processes" says, depression is not only biologically oriented. He focuses on social skills deficit and interpersonal connections. Ignoring interpersonal skills would be wrong. Research says that it is important to understand what is happening interpersonally to the depressed person. *Sergin*, a behavioral scientist says that not only does a depressed person lack social skills but the very way his relations are operated can aggravate the situation. Depression is a common problem

in the youth today. It can also lead to one getting obsessed by inflicting injury to one own self. *Sullivan* emphasizes the role of interpersonal skills in human adaptation. He feels “a personality can never be isolated from the complex of interpersonal relations in which a person lives or has his being” So from this perspective, it is important to understand the nature of social interactions, to understand psychological health and personality of an individual. Some studies have also stated that moods are directly proportional to pleasurable activities. Thus, a depressed mood was associated with a low pleasurable activity. *Blaney* (1977) pointed out that less energy level and sociability are linked to depression. *Libet* and *Lewinsohn* (1973) studied the behavior of undergraduate students. They sided with the general hypothesis that depressed people were less socially skillful. Although there have been various criticisms of this theory but the bottom line is that when people openly communicate, there are more chances of a person venting out troubled thoughts. Bottling up of feelings are expressed and this outlet can be beneficial. So when we communicate, we relieve stress and prevent loneliness and isolation. Another theory called - The minding relationships theory emphasizes mindfulness in relationships. Knowing one another, and the habits of cognition and communication are vital. Trying to understand the perceptions, motivations, and intentions of others is necessary as is disclosing own self. By listening out and trying to know the other person, one demonstrates that the relationship is important. It makes the person feel special and treasuring relationships is a lifelong commitment.

Listening comes along as an essential part of communication. It is the most powerful way of connecting with others. It is found to be more challenging than speaking. Listening is not

only empathetic but also profitable. People listen to gain something either knowledge, information, or for forming relationships. When one is an active listener, connection with others becomes easier. In interpersonal communication, the response shows that the person is listening. This response can be verbal or nonverbal (a nod or gesture) (*Berger & Calabrese*, 1974). Active listeners make an effort to make the speaker know that they are involved and are understanding. Effective listening skills can lead to stronger friendships, greater productivity, and fewer mistakes. When you listen to others, it shows you are giving respect, open to different perspectives and ideas, and non-assuming.

Emotional Intelligence: Another component in establishing good interpersonal skills is emotional intelligence. According to *Dale Carnegie*-When dealing with people, let us remember we are not dealing with creatures of logic. We are dealing with creatures of emotion, creatures bristling with prejudices and motivated by pride and vanity. Our emotional intelligence depends on how we react or respond to such people, how we tackle a problem or situation and how we manage our relationships with others. A person with high emotional intelligence goes a long way in establishing successful relationships. Unfortunately, more interactions are happening with screens rather than people. The youth are so engrossed in their devices that they do not have the time to concentrate on human emotions. Creating empathy can lead to more respect for each other’s feelings. This can also solve the issues of ragging or bullying. The faculty can play a crucial role in making the students understand that they can make a huge difference in society by just expanding their circle of concern. When faculty demonstrates empathy for everyone, including students from different, vernacular

backgrounds and beliefs, they set examples for the rest of the student community. It can sensitize students and make them include students who were invisible till now. After making the students understand, one can make the students to get it into action. Enacting role plays, vignettes or just discussions are ways of practicing and strengthening empathy. Teaching students to calm down their anger and frustration can help them in solving many conflicts. It is essential for the young adults to understand that an empathetic response is crucial. It shows that you care for others. Sometimes, a person is not looking for correction or advice. The only thing he may be looking for is someone lending an ear. When we are fully grown adults, this skill becomes a little difficult to develop. But in the transition phase from teenage to young adult, it is easier to acquire.

Conflict resolution: On the campus, arguments can creep in and relationships can get jeopardized. Conflicts can happen because of differences in values, beliefs, goals, and viewpoints. It is common for people to disagree. It can be stressful but it can also clear the air. It can take a negative toll too on a person. Disagreements can raise tempers and people may end up saying or doing things that they may regret later. So, the best way to maintain harmony is by walking away when you are too angry. Angry words can cause deep hurt. There are many ways to express displeasure and silence is one of them. Calm down and then think with clarity. Sometimes false pride and arrogance can fog the vision. Evaluate, and analyze issues carefully. You do not have to stifle yourself being paranoid of upsetting others. Concerns and feelings need to be voiced openly. But the same can be done amicably. Emotional intelligence plays a very important role here again. Communicating effectively and openly may clear a lot of

misunderstandings and remove distrust, doubts, and errors. The handling of conflict is more important than the conflict itself. So, if students are from an early age taught to manage arguments and conflicts, there are more chances of them maintaining healthier and rewarding relationships in every sphere of life. There is no escape from conflicts. They are everywhere in personal and professional lives. But if the students know how to turn these conflicts into desirable outcomes for all, they can create a win-win for all involved. And that's what collaboration is all about. Conflict resolution is a valued skill these days. If the students are not trained on resolving or managing conflicts at the right age it can only be a recipe for disaster. Many institutions have now started offering courses in conflict resolution, which depicts, it as the need of the hour. Different situations can demand different reactions. A conflict can be avoided or dealt with. But before any reaction, it is always wise to gather more information. It will not only enlighten you more on the issue but also mitigate any negative emotions. Also, selfishness can be a big drowning factor. When a person thinks only from his perspective, he can become self-centered. The focus will shift from win-win to "I Win" and "you lose". Winning at the cost of others can be detrimental to interpersonal relationships. Others can start disliking and distrusting you. It generates hostility as the loser feels cheated. Sometimes avoiding the issue is also a good strategy. Though avoiding issues is not always recommended but sometimes it is a good way especially when the issue is very trivial. It happens generally when siblings fight and the parents avoid taking sides. Also sometimes the other person should be allowed to win because the relationship is important than the issue. At times letting go of the desire to win or prove a point can save relationships.

3.3 The gaps between education and real-life scenarios and the crucial role of University faculty

Sadly, the education system in India is failing the students. It is still stuck in the past. Rote learning that is memorizing without understanding is one of the evils inflicting the Indian education system. There is more one-sided communication flowing from the teacher and hardly any discussions are encouraged. The focus is on marks rather than learning. The absence of healthy discussions, analytical and reasoning skills, has destroyed the creative mind. Memorizing and vomiting the same is regarded as intelligence. It will take some time before the focus shifts to the holistic development of a child with stress on life skills. The students are hugely let down by the current system. They graduate without relevant skills and are found hopelessly lacking in creativity, problem solving, interpersonal skills. Colleges have to realize that the world has changed fundamentally and so has learning. It cannot be confined to the four walls of a classroom. Fostering holistic development is the key. Apart from academics, the focus should be on extracurricular activities that will help build not only good interpersonal skills but also instill confidence and leadership. Managing a lot of stuff will also improve organizational skills. This will also allow the students to network with students and faculty from different departments, make connections and build relationships that can help later in life. Friendships are formed easily when the interests are similar. Calling alumni and professionals to these events can generate potential internships and even employment for students. Faculty members play an important role in harboring unity and managing conflicts among students. They need to be very observant and notice any underlying spark. By helping

students manage their emotions and resolve conflicts, the educator's open doors for healthy interpersonal relationships. The educators can also divide them into heterogeneous groups, that is having a mix of students with different backgrounds and skills. This will foster relationships across different cultures. The old method of dividing the students according to their academic scores should be done away with. The teachers have to create an inclusive atmosphere wherein no student feels left out. Tasks that encourage interdependence should be assigned. Keen observation of students can reveal how students communicate and handle conflicts. Assessment of students should include self and peer evaluation. Deterrent factors should be keenly observed. Ignoring conflicts by the faculty members can only be putting the issue under the carpet until it becomes too big to handle. Conflicts among students can be deleterious and can spoil the classroom and university environment. If not handled properly, the problem can spill outside the campus and it can be disastrous. Assignments can be reduced because too much of it coupled with an addiction to technology, can lessen interactions. By assigning work that encourages collaboration, the importance of teamwork can be emphasized. It should not be limited to classrooms and one has to go beyond it. With suitable intervention by educators, students can be made to subtly understand emotions which can be harmful, and methods of expressing them productively. If the students are made to realize what can be the consequences of unbridled emotions on relationships, then the educator has done the job well. Joining clubs for social welfare can again be a way of exposing students to engage with diverse people. Community service will encourage empathy and gratitude. It can range from sponsoring certain water, sanitation, or education projects to hosting charity drives. This will not only develop social skills but be

a very enriching and rewarding experience for the student community. Since all the events are not forced but voluntary, the students will have the complete freedom to choose. Since there is autonomy, students will also learn the art of managing money, creating relationships, self-discipline, and handling road bumps. They will develop the ability to think through problems, conflicts and negotiate different hurdles that arise. Under a shared mission, students will learn to collaborate. When students actively participate in academics and other co-curricular activities, it makes them well-rounded personalities. It is a chance to try something new and put yourself in the open and have fun too. It gives them a sense of responsibility and accountability. Overcoming obstacles will help to develop higher self-esteem. And it is an established fact that self-esteem and relationships go hand in hand. If we think good of ourselves, we will also be able to think good of others and treat them well. People with low self-esteem are mostly insecure, uncooperative, under confident, and aggressive or submissive. They can be abusive or too controlling. Or on the other hand, take abuse quietly and allow being controlled. They also can be indifferent and inconsistent. They may create walls that block happiness. When students participate and encourage openness, they strengthen their self-esteem. They get validation from others that they are worthy and this is critical to their mental health. Positive people will always build positive relationships.

4. RESEARCH GAP ANALYSIS

There are multiple theories on interpersonal skills and few prominent ones have been taken up. Charles Berger and Richard Calabresein's uncertainty theory developed in 1975 proposes the theory that individuals meeting for the first time go through various levels of uncertainty. There are three different levels-entry, personal, and exit. More communication lessens this

uncertainty. When the students walk into a freer university campus from a strictly monitored and dependent school environment, a lot of uncertainty exists. From the attire to the way the classes are conducted, everything changes. At this time, the students look for people who vibrate on the same frequency. This theory talks of uncertainty which can lead to unpredictability too. And when there is unpredictability, there is a lot of stress on the individual. The theory is based on certain assumptions all of which do not hold good. Like for example, it talks of the possibility of predicting a person's behavior. Human beings can be the most unpredictable. Also, sometimes communications can be automatic and effortless. Reddy (1979) says that when any communication fails, it is the responsibility of the message creator. Sometimes overthinking can destroy communication. In addition, the uncertainty reduction theory emphasizes the provision of information to reduce people's uncertainty. Constant inquisitiveness to seek information is important here and for that, the students need to communicate. It is important to know the values, beliefs, and nature of the others not only to gel well but also to be sensitive to others. Students are not comfortable in the new environment. But with new people and good interpersonal skills, this discomfort can be reduced. As communication with peers and faculty increases, uncertainty reduces and the person finds oneself at ease. In due time this not only reduces the distance between people but also makes one aware of the emotions, thinking and beliefs, of the other person. This knowledge empowers one to be sensitive and thoughtful of their words and actions. And building bonds is just this. Considering the feelings of others and be mindful of not hurting anyone through words and actions can be beneficial. Good interpersonal skills help the students in establishing strong bonds which is

important for their well-being. They lead to feeling good about oneself and others too. Knowing a person well can not only help to connect but also reassure and inspire. Connection and reassurance are what young adults are looking for. Schutz's theory 1958 regarding Fundamental interpersonal relations orientation (FIRO) talks about interactions in a local group. When people get together in a group, they are looking for three things- affection, control, and inclusion. FIRO-B was created to measure these three aspects and were graded in terms of expressed and wanted behavior which defines how much one is ready to give and take/want. Three types of behavior were displayed- deficient, extreme, and ideal. Deficient means that the person is not fully displaying this feeling or satisfying the need. Whereas, excessive scores pointed towards the individual perpetually trying to satisfy the need. A moderate score on the other hand represented ideal interpersonal relations. The behavior of inclusion is highly important at the college level. The young students walking into the campus look to be included in groups as that makes them feel safe and even empowered. Initiating interaction(inclusion) is also extremely important here. Students come from different backgrounds and different vernacular languages. Schooling is preferred in the same city but for higher education students travel to bigger cities. So, students from smaller towns have a huge setback when they see a different culture, and that either forces them to shrink into their cocoons or look to form groups with students having similar language and culture. Both ways are not very encouraging if we want students with the capabilities to work in a global atmosphere. In the same group, the students are not able to learn anything new. Acquiring corporate culture and English proficiency is important to chase their career objectives. Learning English is better and easier in an informal environment

than the classroom and hence they must include themselves in student groups who have command over the language. They are aware that their peers are prejudiced and they find it very demeaning to express their shortcomings. It has also been observed that these students are uncomfortable to reveal that they come from vernacular backgrounds for fear of being ridiculed and hence put up a pretense that they don't care to mix up with others. In such a scenario, students demonstrating the good interpersonal skills of inclusion can be warm and friendly and include these students in their groups. Inclusion into the English-speaking fold can encourage native language speakers to practice English in a non-formal environment. They also can pick up social finesse, again an important requisite for establishing bonds. The students are a community in themselves and if they establish a close bond, it leads to a lot of caring and sharing.

5. CONCLUSION

Through this article, we understood how interpersonal skills contribute to the happiness, health, and success of individuals. The importance of these skills cannot be understated. An absence of these skills can create issues, complicate problems, lead to misunderstandings and sour relationships. If one needs to do well in personal and work life, then one needs to give due importance to these skills. But, just knowing the importance of interpersonal relations is not enough. They need to be nurtured continuously because these relations are the ones that give you complete satisfaction and happiness. One gets so embroiled in the daily mundane life that one stops prioritizing relationships. It may need efforts to maintain good relationships, but the investment pays off in many ways. The bond is very important for a person's well-being. Being understanding, calm, patient and warm are qualities that will help in building strong

interpersonal relations and universities can play a crucial role in developing these. They can offer a ground for the students to come out of their shells, break awkwardness and fight their poor self-confidence. They can open a plethora of opportunities for the students to interact freely and learn from each other. In addition to imparting technical skills, the focus should be on training students on important social skills. Universities should be foresighted and work on developing holistic adults. Motivating the students to partake in co-curricular activities to bring out their talents, experience pleasure, and interact with others, should be encouraged. There should be more focus on personal development courses along with other professional curricula (Stan, 2014). There should be credits for these courses as this will induce the participation of students. The training, however, should take into account the expectations of students and management. And also, the training should be planned and executed in such a way that they stimulate thinking and motivate students and reflect the tangible impact on both the personal and professional lives. It is the duty of all stakeholders, that is, the faculty, management, and students to contribute to the development of professional and personal skills of graduates, and that each one needs to accept the responsibility and cooperate.

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