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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON SOFT SKILLS MANAGEMENT AND THINKING STYLE AS A PREDICTOR FOR PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS' TEACHING COMPETENCY

Dr. M. Saratha
Assistant Professor, Sakthi Institute of Teacher Education and Research, Palakkanuthu, Oddanchatram, Dindigul.

ABSTRACT
This article is elaborately discuss about the soft skills, thinking style and Teaching competency of Prospective Teachers in order for teachers to maintain a high level of professional performance under these conditions, they must assume personal responsibility for their own performance, growth and development. Teachers are the most critical component of any system of Education. Smith and Glenn, (1994) explains that internal factors have an impact on teachers feeling of success and a number of external forces can either aid or hinder a teachers success. There are number of factors that influence Teacher performance. Increased duties and demands on time, low pay and disruptive students have a significant impact on teachers' attitudes toward their jobs. In addition, lack of support from staff at all levels has an effect on teacher performance. Teachers are no exception. Low pay and student conduct problems in the classroom are just a couple of issues that teachers face. Low morale among teachers is another very important problem that must be addressed if the problem of teacher shortages is going to change and ultimately improve.
KEYWORDS: *Soft Skills, Thinking style and Teaching competency and Prospective Teachers.*

INTRODUCTION

Soft skills, also known as people skills, are essential for teachers to build rapport with students, manage the classroom effectively, and foster a positive learning environment. Examples include communication, empathy, active listening, and conflict resolution. These skills are vital for creating a supportive classroom atmosphere where students feel comfortable participating and learning. A teacher's thinking style influences how they approach lesson planning, instruction, and student assessment. A flexible and adaptable thinking style allows teachers to respond to the unique needs of each student, adjusting their approach as needed.

This may involve using different teaching strategies, providing differentiated instruction, or offering alternative assessments. Kumar, C. A.; & Rajendran, K. K. (2021), mentioned that Teaching is one of the most influential professions in society. Good teachers are always optimistic about what their pupils can achieve, whatever their background or circumstances. Teaching competence refers to a teacher's ability to effectively deliver instruction, manage the classroom, and assess student learning. This includes subject matter expertise, pedagogical knowledge, and the ability to create engaging and effective learning experiences. Kumar, C. Ashok (2015), stated that pre-service training of teachers in the making, in-service training may also be given to the existing teachers to refurbish their acumen for teaching that is teaching, effectively and meaningfully. These three areas are not isolated; they are interconnected and influence each other. Strong soft skills can enhance a teacher's ability to connect with students, while a flexible thinking style can help them adapt their teaching to diverse learning needs. Ultimately, a combination of effective soft skills, appropriate thinking styles, and strong teaching competence contributes to a positive and successful learning experience for students.

Need and Significance for the Study

Teaching is incomplete without gaining knowledge of however both pass parallel or aspect with the aid of aspect. Learning results in behavioral change in college students. Teachers are conscious that the taught content in an afternoon, week, or month is remembered later. But something is received well or found out by way of students cannot be retained for a longer length. Memory is a mental construct to signify the occasions going on while we recall and forget about, however complete know-how is gradually gathered. (Dr. C. Ashok Kumar, 2025). Thinking is one of the major aspects of cognitive behaviour. Thinking provides the base to person on which cognitive, affective and conative domains of behaviour depends which properly justify the comment like "think before act". Thinking has a definite purpose and end. It always initiates with some difficulty and ends in its solution. The solution of the problem includes the exploration of the problem mental manipulation of the objects, activities and experiences. Today's educational environment seems to be inclusive after multiple generations. There are two main discussion points in relation to this. First, the web-based instruction environment, likely to isolate learners, requires students to regulate their learning more effectively (Kumar et al., 2016). Thinking styles are not like the intelligence; intelligence refers to the individual capabilities, potential and abilities to perform the task however, thinking styles refers to the individual preferences (Seif, 2008). Style is neither cognition not personality but the combination of them. Thinking style is the ways an individual prefers to conceive information. It also refers to the individual's priority to think about information or task both during and after learning process. Sternberg explains that individuals have not only a specific style but a set of profile of styles. Styles can be modified or adopted in any specific situation (Sternberg, 2009) this modification is also proved by Zhang (2001), stated that

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thinking style is influenced by several factors like age, socioeconomic status, gender, number of hobbies, job, travel, leadership. So the present study intends to measure to soft skills management and thinking style and teaching competency which is entitled the present study. Kumar, C. Ashok (2021), stated that competence and professional skills are the very heart of the programme of teacher education. Professional education should focus on the person as an individual who is in practice and seeks to broaden his mental, moral and emotional capacities.

Terms and Definitions

Soft Skills Management: refers to the character traits and interpersonal skills that characterize a person's relationship with other people. In the workplace. Soft skills are considered to be a complement to hard skills, which refer to person's knowledge and occupational.

Thinking Styles: refers to the cognitive style or thinking style is a concept used in cognitive psychology to describe the way individual think, perceive and remember information.

Teaching Competency: refers to the more than just knowledge and skills; it involves the ability to meet complex demands by drawing on and mobilizing psychological resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context.

Prospective Teachers: refers to those who are studying M.Ed. Programme in Madurai District.

Variables of the Study

Dependent Variable

1. Soft Skills Management, Thinking Style and Teaching Competency

Independent Variables

1. Gender : Male / Female
2. Nativity : Rural / Urban

Objectives of the Study

Following are the specific objectives framed for the study:

1. To measure the level of soft skills management among the prospective teachers.
2. To find out the significant influence of independent variables viz., Gender and Nativity on dependent variable soft skills management among the prospective teachers.
3. To measure the level of thinking styles among the prospective teachers.
4. To find out the significant influence of independent variables viz., gender and Nativity on dependent variables soft Thinking styles among the prospective Teachers.
5. To measure the level of teaching competency among the prospective teachers.
6. To find out the significant influence of independent variables viz., Gender and Nativity on dependent variable soft Teaching competency among the prospective teachers.
7. To find out the relationship among the soft skills management, thinking styles and teaching competency among the prospective teachers.

Hypotheses of the study

The following hypotheses are formulated in the present study:

1. Soft skills management among the prospective teachers is above the average level,
2. Gender exerts a significant influence on Soft skills management among the prospective teachers.
3. Nativity exerts a significant influence on Soft skills management among the prospective teachers.
4. Thinking style among the prospective teachers is above the average level.
5. Gender exerts a significant influence on thinking style among the prospective teachers
6. Nativity exerts a significant influence on thinking style among the prospective teachers.
7. Teaching competency among the prospective teachers is above the average level.
8. Gender exerts a significant influence on teaching competency among the prospective teachers.
9. Nativity exerts a significant influence on teaching competency among the prospective teachers.
10. There is significant and positive relationship among the soft skills management, thinking styles and teaching competency among the prospective teachers.

Methodology – in – Brief

Design: Descriptive, Method: Normative, Technique: Survey

Sample of the Study: A stratified representative sample of 360 prospective teachers in Madurai District with due representation given to the variables viz., Gender and Nativity.

Tools used

The following tools were used by the investigator for the data collection:

1. General Information Sheet developed by the Investigator.
2. Soft skills management scale developed by the investigator.
3. Teaching competency scale developed by the investigator.

Statistical Treatments

The statistical treatments employed in the study are listed below:

- Mean
- Standard Deviation
- 't' – Test for significance of difference between the means of large independent samples.
- Correlation Analysis – Person's Product Moment Correlation-'r'.

Data Analysis and Interpretations

Hypothesis 1

The level of Soft skills management, thinking style and teaching competency among prospective teachers is above average.

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Table 1: Percentage analysis of soft skills management, thinking style and teaching competency among prospective teachers

Variables	Theoretical Average	Average Score for Whole Sample
Soft Skill Management	30	38
Thinking Style	24	40
Teaching Competency	64	90

The average score of the soft skills management among prospective teachers is found to be 38, while the theoretical average is 30. This shows that the soft skills management among prospective teachers is above the average level. Likewise, the average score of the thinking styles among prospective teachers is found to be 40, while the theoretical average is 24. This shows that the thinking styles among prospective teachers is above the average level. Further, the average score of the teaching competency among prospective teachers is found to be 90, while the theoretical average is 64. This shows that the teaching competency among prospective teachers is above the average level.

Hypothesis 2
Gender exerts a significant influence on soft skills management among prospective teachers.

Table 2: Statistical measures and results of test of significance of difference between the means score of soft skills management among prospective teachers: Gender-Wise

Variable	Subcategory	N	M	S.D.	't' - Value	Significance at 0.05 level
Gender	Male	102	38.59	8.72	0.531	Not Significant
	Female	258	38.07	7.66		

It is evident from table 2, that the obtained 't' value 0.531 is lower than the table value 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This show that there is no significant difference between the male and female prospective teachers in terms of soft skills management among prospective teachers. Further, it is observed that gender does not influence on soft skills management among prospective teachers. **Hence the hypothesis 2 is rejected.**

Hypothesis 3
Nativity exerts a significant influence on soft skills management among prospective teachers.

Table 3: Statistical measures and results of test of significance of difference between the means score of soft skills management among prospective teachers: Nativity-Wise

Variable	Subcategory	N	M	S.D.	't' - Value	Significance at 0.05 level
Nativity	Rural	197	38.37	8.19	0.506	Not Significant
	Urban	163	37.94	7.71		

It is evident from table 3, that the obtained 't' value 0.506 is lower than the table value 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there is no significant difference between the rural and urban prospective teachers in terms of soft skills management among prospective teachers. Further, it is observed that nativity does not influence on soft skills management among prospective teachers. **Hence the hypothesis 3 is rejected.**

Hypothesis 4
Gender exerts a significant influence on thinking styles among prospective teachers.

Table 4: Statistical measures and results of test of significance of difference between the means score of thinking styles among prospective teachers: Gender-Wise

Variable	Subcategory	N	M	S.D.	't' - Value	Significance at 0.05 level
Gender	Male	102	43.63	5.91	2.280	Not Significant
	Female	258	40.44	5.67		

It is evident from table 4, that the obtained 't' value 2.280 is higher than the table value 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This show that there is no significant difference between the male and female prospective teachers in terms of thinking styles among prospective teachers. Further, it is observed that male prospective teachers have more thinking styles than female prospective teachers. **Hence the hypothesis 4 is accepted.**

Hypothesis 5
Nativity exerts a significant influence on thinking styles among prospective teachers.

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Table 5: Statistical measures and results of test of significance of difference between the means score of thinking styles among prospective teachers: Nativity -Wise

Variable	Subcategory	N	M	S.D.	't' - Value	Significance at 0.05 level
Nativity	Rural	197	40.26	5.68	-0.821	Not Significant
	Urban	163	40.76	5.78		

It is evident from table 5, that the obtained 't' value -0.821 is lower than the table value 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there is no significant difference between the rural and urban prospective teachers in terms of thinking style among prospective teachers. Further, it is observed that Nativity does not influence on thinking style among prospective teachers. **Hence the hypothesis 5 is rejected.**

Hypothesis 6

Gender exerts a significant influence on teaching competency among prospective teachers.

Table 6: Statistical measures and results of test of significance of difference between the means score of teaching competency among prospective teachers: Gender-Wise

Variable	Subcategory	N	M	S.D.	't' - Value	Significance at 0.05 level
Gender	Male	102	94.50	8.99	2.553	Significant
	Female	258	90.92	8.96		

It is evident from table 6, that the obtained 't' value 2.553 is higher than the table value 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This show that there is no significant difference between the male and female prospective teachers in terms of teaching competency among prospective teachers. Further, it is observed that male prospective teachers have more teaching competency than female prospective teachers. **Hence the hypothesis 6 is accepted.**

Hypothesis 7

Nativity exerts a significant influence on teaching competency among prospective teachers.

Table 7: Statistical measures and results of test of significance of difference between the means score of teaching competency among prospective teachers: Nativity -Wise

Variable	Subcategory	N	M	S.D.	't' - Value	Significance at 0.05 level
Nativity	Rural	197	91.43	9.02	0.734	Not Significant
	Urban	163	90.73	8.91		

It is evident from table 7, that the obtained 't' value 0.734 is lower than the table value 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there is no significant difference between the rural and urban prospective teachers in terms of teaching competency among prospective teachers. Further, it is observed that Nativity does not influence on teaching competency among prospective teachers. **Hence the hypothesis 7 is rejected.**

Hypothesis 8

There are significant and positive relationship among the soft skills management, thinking styles and teaching competency among the prospective teachers.

Variables	Soft Skill Management	Thinking Style	Teaching Competency
Soft Skill Management	1.00	0.276	0.342
Thinking Style	0.276	1.00	0.533
Teaching Competency	0.342	0.533	1.00

The obtained value 'r' are 0.276, 0.342 and 0.553 for soft skills management, thinking styles and teaching competency respectively, while the critical value 0.109. Hence there are significant and positive relationship among the soft skills management, thinking styles and teaching competency among the prospective teachers. **Hence the hypothesis 8 is accepted.**

FINDINGS

The major conclusions arrived at from the study are listed below:

1. Soft skills among the prospective teachers are found high.
2. Soft skills among the prospective teachers is found independent upon-Gender and Nativity.
3. Thinking styles among the prospective teachers are found high.
4. Thinking styles among the prospective teachers is found dependent upon-Gender.
5. Thinking styles among the prospective teachers is found independent upon-Nativity
6. Teaching competency among the prospective teachers are found high.

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7. Teaching competency among the prospective teachers is found dependent upon-Gender.
8. Teaching competency among the prospective teachers is found dependent upon-Nativity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, soft skills, thinking styles, and teaching competence are interconnected and crucial for effective teaching. Strong soft skills, like communication and empathy, enhance classroom management and student relationships. A flexible and adaptable thinking style allows teachers to tailor their approach to diverse learners, while solid teaching competence ensures effective knowledge transfer. Prioritizing the development of these areas is essential for creating a positive and productive learning environment.

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