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## Novice Teacher Perceptions of the Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace

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### Abstract

Soft skills complement hard skills and have a significant impact on the ability of teachers to do their job and on their employability. Soft skill components acquired by future holistic human capital are communicative skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills, team work skill, life-long learning and management of information, entrepreneurship skill, ethics, moral and professional skill, and leadership skill. This research aims to investigate gaps related to soft skills obtained from their teaching professional training compared to the soft skills needed in their workplace among the novice teachers. A total sample of 250 novice teachers was selected from all secondary schools in Malaysia by employing purposive sampling. This study employs the quantitative method to collect data from novice teachers during their induction year. The findings showed that team work skill and communication skill were the two most important soft skill components, not only very much needed in their workplace but also gained from their teaching training program. However, entrepreneurship skill was the least capacity soft skill component needed in their workplace as well as gained from their teaching training program. According to the results of t-test analysis, there is a significant difference between the gained and needed level of soft skill components. In addition, the mean score for all the soft skill components needed in their workplace are higher than what they gained from their teaching training program.

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### 1. Introduction

Teachers are important and they make a difference. The quality of teaching is crucial factor in promoting effective learning in schools (Tang, 2013). Teaching is a complex act, requiring a wide range of knowledge and skills including hard and soft skills to successfully manage the demands of the classroom. Teachers must understand both subject matter and student, as well as how to teach their specific content to the specific learner which needs soft

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skills (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Teaching is additionally complex for novice teachers (Flores & Day, 2006). Their knowledge and skills are necessarily limited by their recent entry into classroom and their understanding of teaching and learning, yet they are given the same roles and responsibilities as veteran teachers. The complexity of teaching extends to the preparation of teachers (Soffner, 2011).

The complicated nature of teaching, in both practice and preparation, encourages teacher educators to explore the complexity of novice teachers' experiences and identify the concerns they face in the first few years. Teacher educators must respond to forces such as application of soft skills in order to prepare teachers for today classroom. By understanding novice teachers' concerns, teacher educators may better prepare pre-service teachers to meet and surmount the challenges posed by those concerns in the first few years of teaching. However, for education and training to be successful in raising productivity, there is a need to focus on the internal and external efficiency of education and training programs. Failure to focus on both internal and external efficiency can result in the mismatch in the supply of graduates in the industries (Abdul Rashid Mohamed et al., 2007).

Soft skills are vital for all teachers to acquire, regardless of their specific expertise. Research suggests that soft skills are just as good an indicator of job performance as traditional job qualifications or hard skills. For example, one study carried out by The Protocol School of Washington, DC and conducted by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation, and the Stanford Research Institute has shown that technical skills and knowledge account for about 15 percent of the reason an individual gets a job, keeps the job and advances in that job (Crosbie, 2005). The remaining 85 percent of job success is based on individual's soft skills.

## **2. What are soft skills**

The Malaysian Institute of Higher Learning interprets soft skills as incorporating aspects of generic skills which include non-academic skills such as communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills, team work, lifelong learning and information skills, entrepreneurship, ethic and professional moral skill, and leadership skill. These seven components of 'soft' skills that are to be embedded in the syllabus taught at Institutes of Higher Learning. In this study, soft skills that needed by novice teachers is referred accordingly to Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (2006).

### *2.1. Communication skills*

Novice teachers are expected to be fluent and able to communicate effectively in both Malay and English language. They should be able to convey their thoughts with clarity and confidence both in written and oral forms. They are also expected to be active listeners while providing the necessary response. They should also be capable of giving and using technology during presentation confidently.

### *2.2. Critical thinking and problem solving skills*

With this skill, novice teachers should be able to think in a critical, creative, innovative, and analytical manner which includes the ability to apply knowledge. Elements that they must possess under this aspect are the ability to identify and analyze complex situation as well as making evaluations that are justifiable. They should also have the ability to expand and improve thinking skills, to provide ideas, and alternative solutions.

### *2.3. Team work*

Team work skills involve the ability to work and cooperate with people from various social and cultural backgrounds so as to achieve a common goal. In order to build a good working relationship with his/her peers, it is essential that they are respectful toward others' attitude, behaviour, and belief. From time to time they are also expected to undertake the role of a leader and a group member interchangeably.

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