

## TEACHER'S SOFT SKILLS AS CORRELATES OF STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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### Abstract

*This study was conducted to examine teachers of English' soft skills as correlates of students' attitude towards learning in Ekiti State secondary schools in Nigeria, with a significant focus on English Language. The study specifically ascertained the attitude of students towards learning in Ekiti State secondary schools. It also determined the level of soft skills that is possessed by teachers of English in Ekiti State secondary schools. In the same vein, the study determined the relationship between teachers' soft skills and students' attitude to learning in Ekiti State secondary schools and examined if there is any relationship between teachers' soft skills and gender. The data for the study were collected by administering questionnaires to 100 teacher-respondents as well as 150 student-respondents, in the selected schools. Closed ended-structured questionnaires were used to gather data for the study. Face and content validity of the instruments were ensured and PPMC (Pearson Product Moment Correlation) method was used to test for reliability of the instruments which gave coefficients of 0.72 and 0.81 respectively. Data collected using the questionnaires were analysed and interpreted. From the analysis, it was discovered that teachers in the state possess a great deal of soft skills, however, many of these soft skills were in moderate levels. Teachers' soft skills positively influenced students' attitude towards academic learning but teacher's gender did not influence their level of possession of soft skills. Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that teachers in the State possess number soft skills, however, many of these soft skills were not fully maximized while teaching. It was also concluded that if teachers employ their soft skills, it will enhance their teaching and as a result, improve students' attitude. Based on the findings of the study, it was equally concluded that teachers' genders have no influence on their level of possession of soft skills. It was therefore recommended, based on the findings of the study: that, teachers of English in the State should endeavour to put their soft skills into use in order to enhance their teaching professional practices. Education stakeholders should also organize seminars for their teachers educating them on the efficacious power and tendencies soft skills have to enhance teaching and learning processes and outcomes.*

**Keywords:** Teacher's Soft Skills, Students' Attitude Teaching and Learning of English Language

### Introduction

Education is at the centre of social, economic, and political development of any nation. According to Geraldine (2015), education is the process by which society transmits knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another. It helps fight ignorance and the acquisition of

knowledge creating a better citizenry in terms of prospects in life. Education is designed to guide the development of individuals in the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences, necessary for individuals to live decent lives as citizens and contribute to the development of the society. The acquisition of these

appropriate skills, abilities and competences is possible through engagement of some teacher inclined factors.

It is an acceptable fact that the teacher is one of the most important factors in the educational process and that teachers are instrumental to the success of any educational programme embarked upon by any government. This is because, apart from being at the implementation level of any educational policy, the realisation of these programmes also depend greatly on teachers' qualities and attributes.

Some researchers have shown that English language teachers can play some significant roles in ensuring that learners meaningfully learn to the point that such students can make a success in their examinations. One of the teacher related factors that may significantly influence learners' performance is teacher's soft skills.

Oxford dictionary defines soft skills as personal attributes that enable a person to interact effectively and harmoniously with other people. Soft skill is a cluster of productive personality traits that characterize one's relationships in a social environment. These skills include communication abilities, leadership traits, time management and in-service training. How a teacher relates with his students goes a long a way in determining the achievement level of the learners.

Soft skills that a teacher should possess to enhance his professional career as itemized by Wikipedia (2021) include: critical thinking, problem solving, public speaking, professional writing, teamwork, digital literacy, leadership, professional attitude, work ethic, career management and intercultural fluency,

among others. Chrisantus (2021) also categorizes soft skills as follows: communication, leadership, cultural awareness, Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL), personal academic growth, etc. He concluded that students whose teachers lack these qualities do not perform well.

Tata and Rabi (2014) mentioned that communication is the strength of any organisation and that the survival and health of the organization depends on effective communication. The school, an educational organisation, is run through communication. Information flows through communication to and from head-teachers, teachers, and students. Communication is the transmission of a message that involves the shared understanding between the contexts in which the communication takes place (Latha, 2019). In addition, teacher communication skills are important for a teacher in the delivery of education to students (Geraldine, 2015). Teachers with good communication skills always make learning easier and more understandable for students. Effective communication skills are really important for teachers of English in the transmitting of instructions, classroom management and interaction with students in the class.

Good communication helps and promote teachers of English' pedagogical skill in the classroom. It also minimizes the potential of unkind feeling during the process of teaching and learning. For an English teacher, it is very pertinent to have good communication skills to create good classroom environment for effective teacher-student interaction to promote effective learning by students and acquisition of desired professional goals. (Oliver, 2018). Effective communication among facilitators, teachers and students ensures that the language used is simple, influencing,

inspiring, convincing, and friendly. Using simple language to communicate the school vision, mission and instructional objectives to students enhance their performance.

English teachers must have good speaking ability to communicate properly to students and facilitate classroom learning and participation. Students depend on their teachers to provide them with instruction, guidance and feedback throughout the learning process. When an English teacher fails to communicate effectively with students, students' concentration level drops, and they eventually lose interest in the concept taught which will lead to poor academic performance. Recent studies by the OECD have found that soft skills can be meaningfully measured within cultural and linguistic boundaries. Such measures include a combination of methods that include self-reported personality, behavioral surveys and objective psychological assessments. These measurements can be improved by collecting data from multiple sources across learning contexts such as the school environment, family context and the wider community and triangulating the data (OECD, 2015).

Time management is an important skill that someone will need to acquire to be successful in his/her life. Many researchers have given great importance to the process of time management in every field of life for individuals as well as for whole nation (Barkas, 2014).

English teachers have a lot of influence on their classroom practices. Their personal professional/career improvement also goes a long way towards improving learners' learning outcomes. Tata and Rabi (2014) assert that availability of qualified teachers determined the performance of students

in schools, but OECD (2015) emphasizes that teachers involved in in-service training were more effective in classrooms as compared to teachers who had not undergone training. For students to be able to make connection between what is taught in school and its application in problem solving in real life, the teacher has to be effective in their teaching. Baker and Westrup (2015) define well qualified teacher as one who is fully certified and holds the equivalent of a major certificate in English as his or her subject matter in the field being taught. Although the formal qualification of teachers is an important indicator for their knowledge and competence in teaching, it only has limited utility in analyzing how well-prepared teachers are, for what they have to teach in schools. Experienced English teachers have a richer background of experience to draw from and can contribute insight and ideas to the course of teaching. Student taught by more experienced teachers appears to achieve higher because their teachers have mastered the content and acquired classroom skills to deal with different types of classroom problems (Bashir, Azeem and Dogar, 2021). It is against this background that this work is set out to find the influence of teachers' soft skills on students' performance in Ekiti state secondary school, Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Considering the huge efforts geared toward teaching and learning practices of English language by several stakeholders such as teachers, curriculum planners and even book authors, it would be ordinarily expected that learners' performance in the subject will be satisfactorily high, but unfortunately, the situation has not been as envisaged. It was observed that many

English teachers do not like allowing their learners to get any close to them, claiming that the students may disrespect them (Michael, 2017). As a result, learners see their teachers as being difficult and unapproachable. This causes many students who need clarification to be afraid to ask questions in the classroom. Several studies have investigated the possible causes of the low performance of students. Among several reasons which have been identified to be responsible for students' low performance, are teachers' teaching strategies, students' attitude towards learning, parental socio-economic status among others. However, not much has been done to explore possible influence of teachers' soft skills. This study therefore sets out to find out the influence of English teachers' soft skills on students' academic performance in English language in Ekiti State secondary schools, Nigeria.

### Objectives of the study

The main purpose of this study is to find out the influence of teachers' soft skills on students' attitude towards the learning of English language in Ekiti State secondary schools, Nigeria.

### Research Questions

The following research questions are raised for the study:

- What is the attitude of students towards learning of English language in Ekiti state secondary schools?
- What is the level of soft skills that is possessed by English teachers in Ekiti state secondary schools?
- Is there a significant relationship between teachers' soft skills and students' attitude to the learning in Ekiti state secondary schools?

- Is there any relationship between teachers' soft skill and gender

### Review of Related Empirical studies on Teacher's Soft Skills on Students' Academic Performance

Teacher experience has a significant effect on pupil performance in primary schools and at upper secondary level. Experienced teachers have a richer background of experience to draw from and can contribute insight and ideas to the course of teaching and learning, are open to correction and are less dictatorial in classroom. Teachers' experience and student achievement was that students taught by more experienced teachers achieve at a higher level, because their teachers have mastered the content and acquired classroom management skills to deal with different types of classroom problems (Dusenbery, 2019). Furthermore, more experienced teachers are considered to be more able to concentrate on the most appropriate way to teach particular topics to students who differ in their abilities, prior knowledge and backgrounds (Derk, 2014).

. Akinsolu (2017) reveals that at the high school level, students taught by teachers with more than nine years of experience had significantly higher test scores than students whose teachers had five to nine years of experience. Coonen (2017) suggest that teacher' effectiveness increases dramatically each year during the first ten years of teaching". Chrisantus (2021) assert a positive relationship between teachers' verbal ability and composite student achievement, verbal ability has been considered an indicator of teacher quality. The basic logic is that teachers rely on talk to teach (explaining, questioning, and providing directions).

What verbal ability means and how to measure it, it turns out, are not straightforward. Geraldine (2015) measured teachers' verbal ability with a 30-item sentence completion test. Thus, though talk about the importance of teachers' verbal ability persists, it is not a strong measure of teacher quality.

A survey was carried out by Anita, Jairo, Odhiambo and Mary (2016) titled influence of teacher's soft skills on students' academic achievement among secondary schools in Kenya. The study administered questionnaire on a selected sample, which represented all the teachers in the 26 public secondary schools in Nandi District in Kenya. The findings of the study revealed clearly that as the number of years of teaching progresses, students' academic achievement increases. This is evident with the fact that teachers having less than 3 years of experience, students' academic achievement is below average (83.3%) as compared to teachers who have 12 years and above teaching experience whose students' academic achievement is high (100%). Therefore, they 'concluded that as the number of teachers' years of experience progresses, student academic achievement increases and vice versa. On teacher' qualification, the study established that 65% of teachers were degree holders, 25% had diploma certificates while only 10% were untrained. Cross tabulation results suggest that there was no difference in performance between teachers who had degrees or diploma suggesting that teacher qualification did not result to increased student academic achievement. The chi square result illustrate that there is no significant result between teacher qualification and student academic achievement. Participation of teachers in professional development programmes has benefited

a lot with improvisation of teaching methods. Teachers with 3 years and above of teaching, recorded higher student academic achievement.

### Research Design

The research design to be used in this study was a descriptive research of the survey type. The population for this study comprises all the Secondary School English teachers and students in Ekiti State. One hundred (100) teachers of English language as well as one hundred and fifty (150) students were randomly selected from the secondary schools for the study using purposive sampling for the teachers of English and systematic sampling techniques respectively for choosing the sample .

### Instrumentation

A validated and well- structured Questionnaire on Teachers' Soft Skills (QTSS) was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire comprises of two sections: Section A sought information on the bio-data of the respondents such as: gender, age range, Academic qualification and years of experience. While the section B contains 16-items on the teachers' soft skills. The section B were scaled on four point Likert-type rating scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 to Strongly Disagree (SD) =1. Its reliability was assessed, and the gathered data was evaluated utilizing PPMC (Pearson Product Moment Correlation) with 0.71 and 0.82 coefficients respectively. Data collected was analysed using descriptive of frequency counts, percentages, charts and mean of the data collated.

### Results and Discussion

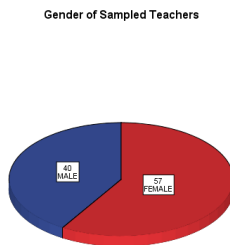
The results are described in tables and are discussed based on the findings of the study.

### Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' and students' Bio-data

The pie chart shows that male teachers' account for 40 of the respondent and 57 of the female respondent. The indication is that there were more female teachers than the male teachers.

## Results

**Figure 1**

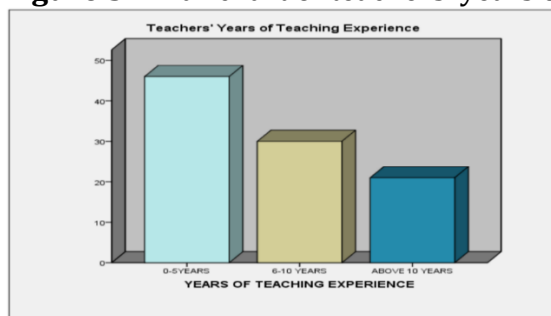


**Figure 2:** Bar chart showing teachers academic qualification



The bar chart above shows that 42 of the respondents had NCE, 42 had first degree, 7 had master's degree, and 5 had Ph.D. Indication is that there are more NCE holders among the teachers.

**Figure 3:** Bar chart of teachers' years of teaching experience



The figure above shows that majority of the teachers (45) had 0-5 years' experience, 30 had 6-10 years'

experience and 25 of the teachers had 25 experience.



## Discussion

A total of one hundred public Secondary School English teachers were used for the study but only ninety-seven (97) correctly completed their questionnaires. Out of the 97 teacher-respondents, 40 were males while 57 were females with the percentage of 41 and 59 percentages for male and female teachers respectively. Figure 2 indicates the academic qualifications of the sampled teachers. Forty two (42) of the

teachers had NCE and 42 had first degree certificate; seven (7) had master's degree and five (5) had the Ph.D. certificates. Hence, a large number of the teachers had the NCE certificate. Figure 3 shows that forty seven (47) teachers had a teaching experience of 0-5years, thirty (30) teachers had teaching experience of 6-10years, while twenty (20) teachers had a teaching experience of above 10 years. Thus, most of the teachers had teaching experience of 0-5 years.

**Figure 4:** Bar chart showing the gender of students sampled for the study

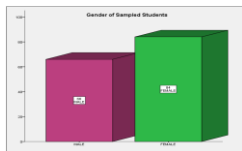


Figure 4 reveals that sixty (66) of the student-respondents were males, and 84 were females.

**Figure 5:** Reveals the class distribution of students in the study

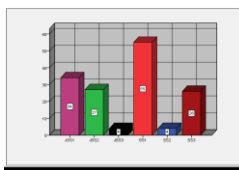


Figure 5 above shows that the total number of these students was 150. Thirty four (34) students were in JSS 1, twenty seven (27) were in JSS 2, four (4)

were in JSS 3, fifty five were in SS 1, four (4) were in SS 2 and twenty six (26) were in SS 3.

**Research Question 1:** What is the attitude of students towards learning in Ekiti state secondary schools?

**Table 1: Attitude of Students towards the Academic Learning**

S/No	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Learning will help me in life.	1.50	.54	Positive
2	Learning helps improve my academic performance.	1.63	.67	Positive
3	Learning improves the growth of my mind.	1.63	.63	Positive
4	Learning improves my personality.	1.68	.75	Positive
5	Learning increases my self-esteem.	1.65	.74	Positive
6	Learning increases in self-confidence.	1.67	.72	Positive
7	I am more knowledgeable because I learn continually	1.61	.66	Positive
8	Learning has helped my communication.	1.63	.67	Positive
9	I feel happy when I learn.	1.73	.70	Positive
10	Learning has helped in my making good friends.	1.84	.72	Positive
11	I enjoy attending classes.	1.86	.71	Positive
12	Learning is easy.	1.67	.67	Positive
13	Learning makes me proud.	1.76	.78	Positive
14	Learning makes me anxious.	1.91	.93	Positive
15	I just hate learning.	1.79	.86	Positive
16	I am always interested in learning.	1.61	.66	Positive

**\*Mean Value  $\geq 1.5$  = Positive Attitude; Mean Value  $\leq 1.5$  = Negative Attitude.**

Table 1 indicates the attitude of students towards the learning in Ekiti state secondary schools. Students' response to the statements on their attitudes towards the learning was positive. Thus, it can be inferred that students in Ekiti

state secondary schools possess a positive attitude towards learning.

**Research Question 2:** What is the level of soft skills that is possessed by teachers in Ekiti state secondary schools?

**Table 2: Levels of Soft Skills Possessed by Teachers In Ekiti state Secondary Schools**

S/No	Statements	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	I have high expectations for my students	1.38	.64	Moderate
2	I am flexible while teaching	1.54	.63	High
3	I pay equal attention to all my students	1.44	.56	Moderate
4	I motivate my students regularly	1.41	.61	Moderate
5	Teachers shows empathy	1.58	.64	High
6	I am culturally sensitive to all my students	1.49	.61	Moderate
7	I encourage high order thinking among my students	1.51	.68	High
8	I have high regard for all my students	1.48	.63	Moderate
9	I provide leadership to my students	1.43	.56	Moderate
10	I encourage team work among my students	1.46	.61	Moderate
11	I love working along with my colleagues	1.51	.61	High
12	I am responsible to my students and school	1.58	.66	High
13	I show integrity with all my dealings with students and school	1.49	.68	Moderate
14	I adequately manage my time well during lessons	1.47	.56	Moderate
15	I try making good decisions in my teaching processes	1.44	.56	Moderate
16	I have a good self-esteem as a teacher	1.46	.63	Moderate

**\*Mean  $\geq 1.5$  = High Level; Mean  $\geq 1.3 \leq 1.49$  = Moderate Level; Mean  $\leq 1.29$  = Low Level**

**Table 3: Relationship between teachers' soft skills and gender**

	Correlations	Teachers' Soft Skills	Gender
Teachers' Soft Skills	Pearson Correlation	1	-.057
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.580



<b>Gender</b>	N	97	97
	Pearson Correlation	-.057	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.580	
	N	97	97
	N	97	97

Table 2 reveals the level of soft skills possessed by Ekiti state secondary school teachers. As indicated, teachers in the state do possess a great deal of soft skills, as many of the statements rated moderate and high levels. However, many of these soft skills were in moderate levels. Thus, it can be inferred

that teachers in the state have moderate levels of soft skills.

**Research Question 3:** Is there a significant relationship between teachers' soft skills and students' attitude to the learning in Ekiti state secondary schools?

**Table 4: Relationship between English teachers' soft skills and students' attitude to learning in Ekiti State secondary schools**

	<b>Correlations</b>	<b>Teacher soft Skills</b>	<b>Students Attitude Towards Learning</b>
<b>Teacher soft Skills</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.281**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.005
	N	97	97
<b>Students Attitude Towards Learning</b>	Pearson Correlation	.281**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	
	N	150	150

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 depicts the relationship between English teachers' soft skills and students' attitude to the learning in Ekiti state secondary schools. As revealed in the table, there exist a statistically significant relationship between English teachers soft skills and students attitude towards the learning ( $r = .28$ ;  $p < 0.005$ ). Thus, teachers' possession of soft skills does lead to students' positive attitudes towards the learning.

## Discussion

The study examined influence of English teacher's soft skills on students' attitude in Ekiti State secondary schools in Nigeria. The findings of the study revealed that students have dichotomous feeling towards learning. Eckard and Kearny (2016) described soft skills as any social skill which facilitates

interaction and communication with others. Davies and Pearse (2017) mentioned the subtle significance of soft skills that though soft skills get little respect but will either make or break teachers' career. A study at Harvard University found that only 15% of a man's career success is provided by their hard skills, whilst the remaining 85% by so called soft skills (Derk, 2014). Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD (2015) found that soft skills can be meaningfully measured within cultural and linguistic boundaries and that such measures include a combination of methods that include self-reported personality, behavioural surveys and objective psychological assessments.

Table 2 reveals the level of soft skills possessed by Ekiti state secondary

school teachers. The study revealed that teachers in the State do possess a great deal of soft skills in different proportions, as many of the statements rated moderate and high levels. The findings revealed that teachers are highly flexible while teaching (1.54). Coonen (2017) also mentioned emphatically in support of the findings that teachers who involved in in-service training are more effective in classrooms as compared to teachers who had not undergone training. This is because the teachers have mastered the content and acquired classroom management skills to deal with different types of classroom problems (Dusenbery, 2019). Akinsolu (2017) also investigated influence of teachers' qualification on their teaching delivery. He asserted that availability of qualified teachers determined the performance of students in schools and that the teachers will be flexible in his/her approach.

Findings of the study also revealed that teachers shows empathy (1.58); they encourage high order thinking among their students (1.51); they love working along with their colleagues (1.51) and they are responsible to their students and school (1.58). Wirth, Clotfelter and Vigdor (2017) indicated that teacher's attitude contributes significantly to student attention in classrooms whereas Adesoji and Olatunbosun (2018) illustrates that student attitude was related to teacher characteristics. However, findings show that many of these soft skills were in moderate levels.

Green and Skinner (2015) buttressed the findings that teachers who give great attention (time) to their tasks always show higher outcomes. They added that when teachers have everything planned out, they have more of a balanced work-life and enhance their teachers'

productivity which will enable them to work in smarter ways. Likewise, Jamal (2014) supported the findings that effective time management reduces job stress and increases the job performance of teachers. In the same vein, Claessens, van Eerde, Rutte and Roe (2017) in agreement with the findings, acknowledged that better time management give more control of a teacher to his/her time and resultantly decreases the work anxiety and increases the job performance. In addition, Boniwell (2014) supported the findings that time management skills break down teachers' day and their goals into manageable pieces.

Table 3 revealed that there exist a statistically significant relationship between teachers soft skills and students attitude towards the learning ( $r = .28$ ;  $p < 0.005$ ). This is in consonance with the finding of Adu and Olatundun (2017) that the mere presence of teacher in the classroom, due to their relationship with the students, puts students in check. Adesoji and Olatunbosun (2018) also corroborated the findings that teachers' soft skills help students improve in their learning. The teachers can help the students by listening to the concerns of the students' parents in situations, building trust with the parents and obtaining areas where involvement of the parents can solve problems. However, Geraldine (2015) negates the findings that though teachers' verbal ability persists, it is not a strong measure of teacher quality.

Table 4 also indicated the relationship between teachers' soft skills and gender, that there exist a negative and statistically non-significant relationship between teachers soft skills and their gender ( $r = -0.057$ ;  $p > 0.005$ ). This implies that teachers' gender does not determine the type or kind of soft

skills the teachers will possess. The data for the study were collected by administering questionnaires to 97 teacher-respondents as well as 150 student-respondents, in the selected schools. From the analysis, it was revealed that:

1. Students had anxiety for learning but they still recognize the place of education in their lives
2. English teachers in the state possess a great deal of soft skills, however, many of these soft skills were in moderate levels.
3. Teachers' soft skills positively influence students' attitude towards academic learning.
4. Teacher's gender does not influence their level of possession of soft skills.

### Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that students have anxiety for academic learning. It was also concluded that teachers in the state possess a number of soft skills. However, many of these soft skills were not fully maximized while teaching and as a result improve student's attitude. Based on the findings of the study, it was equally concluded that teacher's gender have no influence on their level of possession of soft skills.

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