



# AGRI MAGAZINE

(International E-Magazine for Agricultural Articles)

Volume: 03, Issue: 04 (April, 2026)

Available online at <http://www.agrimagazine.in>

© Agri Magazine, ISSN: 3048-8656

## Role of Soft Skills and Hard Skills in Students' Academic Development

\*Preeti, Ella Rani and Santosh

Dept. of Extension Education and Communication Management,  
College of Community Science, CCSHAU, Hisar, Haryana (125001) India

\*Corresponding Author's email: [preetisaini8141@gmail.com](mailto:preetisaini8141@gmail.com)

Students' academic development is influenced by both hard skills and soft skills, which together contribute to their overall educational success and future career readiness. Hard skills refer to technical, measurable and subject-specific competencies such as subject knowledge, writing ability, computer literacy, research skills and analytical abilities. In contrast, soft skills include personal attributes and interpersonal competencies such as communication, teamwork, leadership, adaptability, emotional intelligence and time management. While hard skills directly affect examination performance, assignments and practical work, soft skills support effective learning through improved classroom participation, confidence, collaboration and stress management. Among soft skills, oral communication plays a significant role in academic development as it enhances students' ability to express ideas clearly, participate in discussions and perform effectively in presentations and seminars. Its major dimensions include knowledge, active cognition, conation, affection and sensory-motor abilities, all of which contribute to successful communication. The study highlights that academic success is not determined solely by marks and grades but also by students' ability to apply knowledge and interact effectively in educational settings. A balanced development of both hard and soft skills leads to better academic performance, employability and personal growth. Therefore, educational institutions should focus on integrating both skill sets through workshops, seminars, experiential learning and student-centered teaching approaches to ensure holistic development of students

**Keywords:** Soft Skills, Hard Skills, Academic Development, Oral Communication, Academic Performance

### Introduction

Education is not only about acquiring subject knowledge but also about developing the overall personality and competence of students. In the present competitive academic environment, students require both hard skills and soft skills for their academic success and future career growth. Hard skills refer to the technical knowledge and subject-specific competencies that are measurable and teachable, while soft skills include communication, leadership, teamwork, adaptability and emotional intelligence that shape students' behaviour and interpersonal effectiveness. Academic development plays a vital role in shaping students' intellectual growth, career readiness and lifelong learning abilities. It reflects not only students' academic performance in terms of grades and achievements but also their capacity to apply knowledge effectively in real-life situations. A well-rounded academic development process equips students with both cognitive and interpersonal competencies, enabling them to succeed in academic settings as well as in future professional environments.

In the context of education, hard skills refer to the technical and subject-specific knowledge that can be taught, measured and evaluated through examinations and

assessments. These include competencies such as mathematical ability, scientific understanding, writing skills and proficiency in technology. On the other hand, soft skills encompass personal attributes and interpersonal abilities that influence how students interact, communicate and manage their learning processes. Skills such as critical thinking, adaptability, collaboration and time management are increasingly recognized as essential components of effective learning. The integration of both skill sets is crucial for achieving comprehensive academic development.

Despite the recognized importance of both soft skills and hard skills, many educational systems continue to prioritize academic knowledge over interpersonal and behavioral competencies. This imbalance may limit students' overall development and affect their academic performance in the long term. There is a need to examine how both types of skills contribute individually and collectively to students' academic development. Understanding this dual role can help educators design more balanced and effective teaching strategies, thereby enhancing students' learning outcomes.

## Definitions

According to the definition of the 2023 Merriam-Webster dictionary, a skill is “the ability to use one’s knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance”. In more concrete terms, “skill” refers to an individual’s ability to accomplish tasks by utilising appropriate resources, including those acquired through training or previous experience (Le Boterf, 2015).

## Soft Skills

In 1972, the term “soft skills” was first used by the researcher Paul G. Whitmore, during a training conference in Texas for the US Army Continental Army Command (CONARC). Whitmore used the term “soft skills” to refer to crucial job-related skills that involve little or no interaction with machines. They may as well be considered behaviours that a person must mobilise in order to reach a given objective competently. Soft Skills are described as a cluster of personality traits, social skills and emotional intelligence (EQ) that characterize relationships and work effectiveness. Soft skills are personal attributes, behavioural traits and interpersonal abilities that enable individuals to interact effectively and harmoniously with others. These skills are non-technical in nature and are closely associated with personality development and emotional intelligence. In the educational context, soft skills help students participate confidently in classroom discussions, work effectively in teams, handle stress and develop leadership qualities.

## Hard Skills

Hard Skills defined as teachable, measurable and often technical abilities required to perform specific tasks, typically learned via training or formal education. These include subject knowledge, technical competence, writing skills, computer literacy, research methodology and analytical abilities. Hard skills are often evaluated through tests, assignments, practical examinations and academic certifications. For students, hard skills represent the foundation of academic achievement because they directly contribute to examination performance and subject mastery. Examples include mathematical ability, scientific experimentation, report writing, programming skills and data analysis.

## Oral Communication as a Soft Skill

Oral communication is considered one of the most important soft skills in students' academic development. It enables students to express their ideas clearly, participate actively in classroom discussions, deliver presentations confidently and interact effectively with teachers and peers. Effective oral communication is not limited to speaking alone; it involves several interconnected components that contribute to successful message delivery. Researchers have identified different dimensions of oral communication and evaluated their level of importance on a scale of 1 to 5 (Lamri and Lubart, 2023).

**1. Knowledge:** Knowledge is a fundamental component of oral communication and has been rated 4 out of 5 in importance. Effective communication requires a strong

understanding of the subject matter, the context of discussion and the nature of the audience. Students who possess adequate knowledge can explain concepts accurately, provide relevant examples and support their arguments with confidence. In academic settings, knowledge helps students perform better in seminars, presentations, viva voce and group discussions.

2. **Active Cognition:** Active cognition has been rated the highest with 5 out of 5, showing its critical role in oral communication. It refers to the ability to think actively, process information quickly and respond appropriately during communication. Students must listen carefully, understand audience reactions and adjust their message accordingly. Critical thinking, decision-making and problem-solving are essential aspects of active cognition, especially when answering questions, handling objections, or participating in debates and discussions.
3. **Conation:** Conation, rated 4 out of 5, refers to the willingness and motivation to act confidently. It includes traits such as self-confidence, initiative and extroversion that encourage students to participate in oral communication activities. Students with strong conative abilities are more likely to speak confidently in front of others, overcome fear of public speaking and engage actively in academic interactions. This dimension helps in building presentation confidence and leadership qualities.
4. **Affection:** Affection is also rated 4 out of 5 and highlights the emotional aspect of oral communication. It includes empathy, emotional control and the ability to understand the feelings of others. In academic communication, students who can manage their emotions remain calm during presentations and communicate more effectively. Empathy helps them connect with the audience, understand their responses and create a positive learning environment. Warmth, enthusiasm and emotional intelligence make communication more engaging and persuasive.
5. **Sensory-Motor Abilities:** Sensory-motor abilities are rated 3 out of 5 and involve the physical aspects of communication such as gestures, facial expressions, posture, eye contact and voice modulation. Although these are considered less critical compared to other dimensions, they still contribute significantly to effective oral communication. Proper body language helps students make stronger impressions, maintain audience attention and deliver messages more confidently.

### Overall Significance of Oral Communication

The analysis shows that all five components knowledge, active cognition, conation, affection and sensory-motor abilities are important for developing strong oral communication skills. This demonstrates that oral communication is a complex and multidimensional soft skill rather than simply the ability to speak. In the context of students' academic development, strengthening oral communication improves classroom participation, presentation performance, interpersonal relationships and overall academic confidence. Therefore, educational institutions should give equal attention to developing oral communication skills alongside technical and subject-related competencies.

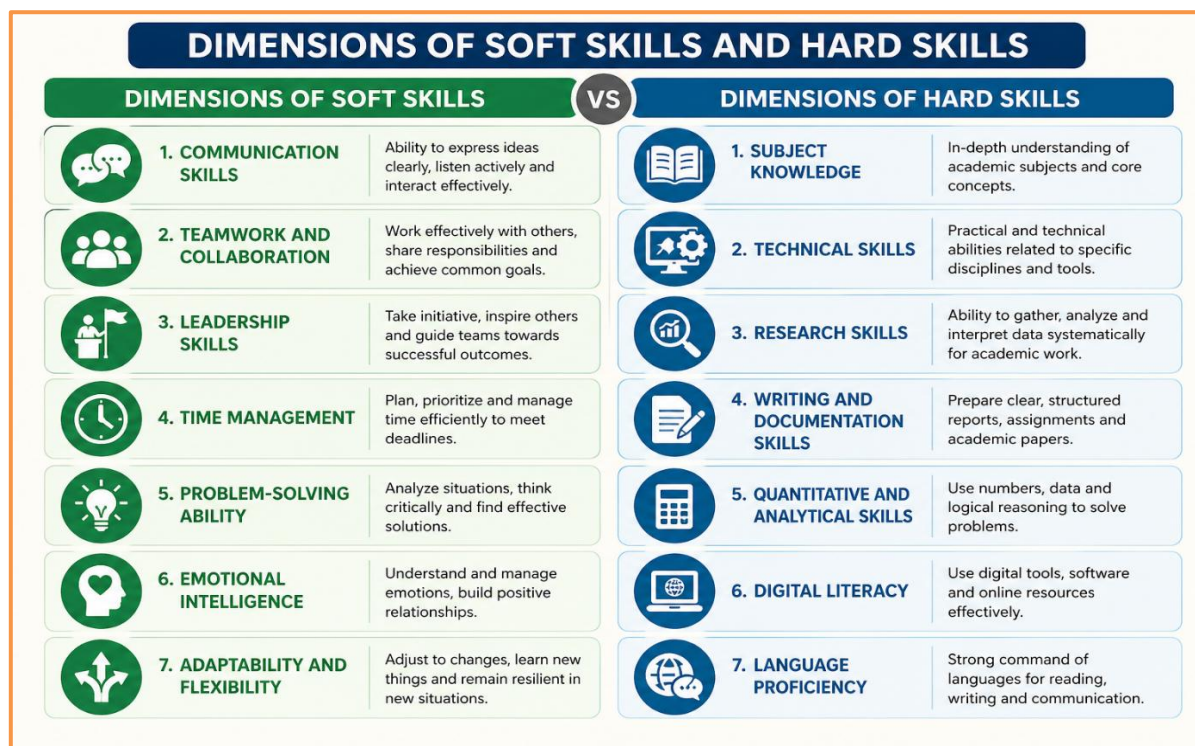
### Impact on Academic Performance

Both soft skills and hard skills significantly influence students' academic performance and overall development. Hard skills directly affect examination scores, assignment quality, practical performance and subject understanding. Students with strong technical and academic knowledge tend to perform better in formal evaluation systems. For example, good research and writing skills improve dissertation quality, while strong analytical skills enhance problem-solving in science and mathematics.

Soft skills indirectly but powerfully contribute to academic success. Communication skills improve classroom participation and presentation performance. Time management reduces procrastination and increases productivity. Emotional intelligence helps students handle academic pressure and maintain motivation. Leadership and teamwork improve group project outcomes and peer learning. Studies indicate that students who possess a balance of both skill sets perform better academically and demonstrate higher confidence and

employability. Soft skills complement hard skills by transforming knowledge into practical and socially effective performance. For instance, a student may have excellent technical knowledge (hard skill), but if they cannot present their ideas clearly (soft skill), their academic and professional progress may be restricted. Similarly, confidence and communication without strong subject knowledge may not ensure sustained success. So, the combination of soft skills and hard skills creates a strong foundation for academic excellence and career readiness.

## Dimensions of Soft Skills and Hard Skills



**Fig: Visual Representation of Dimensions of Soft Skills and Hard Skills.**

## Conclusion

The academic development of students depends on the balanced growth of both soft skills and hard skills. Hard skills provide the technical and intellectual foundation necessary for academic achievement, while soft skills enhance personality, communication, leadership and adaptability. In the modern education system, success is no longer determined only by marks and grades but also by students' ability to apply knowledge effectively and interact positively with others. Educational institutions should therefore focus on integrating soft skill development along with academic teaching. Workshops, seminars, group activities, internships, presentations and experiential learning can help students strengthen both types of skills. Teachers also play an important role in encouraging holistic development rather than focusing solely on examination performance. Both the skills are complementary rather than separate components of education. Together, they contribute significantly to students' academic development, personal growth and future professional success.

## References

1. Lamri, J. and Lubart, T. (2023). Reconciling hard skills and soft skills in a common framework: The generic skills component approach. *Journal of Intelligence*, 11(6), 107.
2. Le Boterf, G. (2015). *Construire les compétences individuelles et collectives: Agir et réussir avec compétences, les réponses à 100 questions*. Editions Eyrolles.
3. Merriam-Webster, Inc. (1996). *Merriam-Webster's dictionary of law*. Merriam-Webster.