

An Exploration Of Soft Skills In Relation To Teaching Competencies: A Correlational Study

Amna Saleem¹, Farah Deeba (CA)², Lubna Quddus Warsi³, Syeda Zunaira Fatima⁴

Abstract

Soft skills refer to non-technical skills that are crucial for proficient communication, problem-solving, and collaboration. Within the realm of education, soft skills are of utmost importance, as teachers must possess a strong foundation of knowledge and pedagogical expertise. Nevertheless, it is imperative for teachers to proficiently engage in communication with pupils, effectively cooperate with colleagues and parents, and efficiently handle their time and workload. This correlational study explores the relationship between soft skills and teaching competencies. We collected data using a questionnaire that consisted of two parts: one assessing the teachers' soft skills and the other assessing their teaching competencies. We used the positivism paradigm in this quantitative research study. The population included all public-sector university teachers in Punjab. Using the cluster sampling method, researchers chose 152 teachers from Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Islamia University, Bahawalpur, Ghazi University, and Dera Ghazi Khan. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences analyzed the data using mean, standard deviation, skewness kurtosis, Pearson correlation coefficient, and regression. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between soft skills and teaching competencies, suggesting that teachers with higher soft skills will likely have better teaching competencies. This study suggests that creating awareness about the importance of soft skills in the teaching and learning process should be considered an essential component of teacher training programs.

Keywords: *Soft Skills, Teaching Competencies, University Teachers.*

INTRODUCTION

In this age of technology, teachers have new academic and social responsibilities. This has made the job of a teacher much more difficult. Teachers are responsible for designing the future of their students and, therefore, society. They are expected to demonstrate the universal values of peace, justice, and equality and the social and civic values enshrined in the Pakistan Constitution. Teachers should, therefore, be academically competent, technically skilled, and emotionally civilized. Teachers are expected to acquire and develop complex skills, such as technical ability and soft skills, also known as human and life skills, to be competent in their teaching careers. Teachers with soft skills are in great demand in the present educational system to serve as role models in interpersonal relationships and decision-making. An educator who serves as a teacher in the classroom while remaining an educator outside of the classroom must embody soft skills in his personality and transmit them to his students. Teachers with specific skills can enhance the effectiveness of their teaching and the quality of education. These skills and competencies are crucial in all fields

¹Department of Education, The Women University, Multan, Pakistan.

²Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan.

³Assistant Professor, Department of Education, University of ISP Multan, Pakistan.

⁴Lecturer, Institute of Education, University of Sargodha.

and industries, including higher education. There is a growing need to teach soft skills and competencies in this sector to prepare teachers to integrate new technologies into their work (Srinivasan & Pugalenthi, 2019).

To successfully manage classroom demands, teachers need a wide range of knowledge and skills, including hard and soft skills (Ngang et al., 2015). Teaching is complex; university teachers must have specific soft skills to teach successfully. Quality teaching promotes effective university learning (Tang, 2020). In teaching, soft skills like communication, time management, leadership, positivity, and teamwork are crucial (Rogers, 2020). The success of today's job market depends on various soft skills, including technical and digital skills, communication, critical thinking, cooperation, and problem-solving. Teachers need to possess these skills to meet the needs of students in the 21st century (Bender et al., 2015). Recent research has highlighted the importance of soft skills for success in the modern world (Wegerif & Mansour, 2010). These skills encompass technical and digital abilities and essential traits like communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, and cooperation. This collection of skills is also known as teacher competence (Gallardo-Echenique et al., 2015).

In addition, technical skills are related to specific job abilities, while soft skills are transferable abilities necessary for effective communication, critical thinking, cooperation, and problem-solving (Rodríguez et al., 2021). University teachers need to possess solid and soft skills to achieve a high level of teaching proficiency, which is crucial for the success of any educational program (Maisiri & van Dyk, 2020). Previous studies have emphasized the importance of developing advanced-level soft skills to improve teacher competence. Soft skills, which are cross-functional abilities, correlate strongly with teacher competence (Farmer & Ramsdale, 2016). Moreover, soft skills generally refer to an individual's personal and social abilities associated with their character and personality (Freiman et al., 2017).

According to (Tulgan, 2016), soft skills are transferable and valuable across many aspects of a teacher's academic and professional life. Specific soft skills are associated with personal attributes, whereas others are associated with intellectual abilities (Claxton et al., 2016). These abilities are critical for teachers, particularly in developing competencies (Hendarman & Cantner, 2018), and substantially impact professional development, education and training, social relationships, and general well-being (Kyllonen, 2013). Multiple researchers have focused on these variables. It has been discovered that soft skills are critical for teachers and administrators (Kanokorn et al., 2014). According to (Balakrishnan & Raju, 2015), teaching competency and soft skill acquisition are vigorously associated (Pachaiyappan & Sadayakumar, 2018), who discovered a substantial positive association between soft skills and teaching competency. According to the findings of the study (Mathews & Reddy, 2018), teachers at the secondary level have intermediate levels of soft skills, indicating that there are areas where efforts might be made to strengthen their soft skills.

According to previous relevant studies, a research gap was discovered, as studies still needed to be undertaken at the university level in the Pakistani scenario. At the university level, study on these issues is scarce in Pakistan. Considering this problem, the researchers of this study aimed to investigate the relationship between soft skills and teaching abilities in university teachers.

The objectives of the study were:

- To assess the relationship between soft skills and teaching competencies of university teachers.
- To determine the soft skills as a predictor among teaching competencies of university teachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Soft Skills

Soft skills comprise a variety of personality qualities, social graces, linguistic facility, individual habits, friendliness, and optimism that individuals develop during their developmental stages (Hurrell, 2016). Soft skills are characteristics, attitudes, habits, and social graces that constitute a person's characteristics (Matteson et al., 2016). The abilities, skills, and attitudes that are influenced more by personality, attitude, and behavior than by formal or technical knowledge are referred to as "soft skills," sometimes known as "people skills" or "human skills" (Rogers, 2020). "soft skills" refers to personal qualities that help a person get along with others, do their job, and think about their career more easily (Vasanthakumari, 2019). Soft skills refer to how one interacts with others and maintains human relationships and include a variety of personal characteristics, social grace, fluency in language, personal habits, friendliness, optimism, and other qualities (Cimatti, 2016).

If they are going to work in an environment that demands maximum performance, the personal and social skills that tutors need to possess are considered soft skills (Hirsch, 2017). Individuals must possess abilities and capabilities to reach professional competence. In contrast, personal characteristics that influence one's future regarding social interactions, job performance, and career prospects are considered "soft skills" (Ibrahim et al., 2017). Soft skills are one of the most influential aspects influencing job success in today's chaotic environment and were investigated from a variety of viewpoints, including knowledge, skills, work habits, and personal traits, which are sets of behaviors that apply to a variety of settings (Soare, 2015).

Soft skills are divided into social, physical, and communication. Social skills involve group interaction and well-being, while psychological skills involve understanding the participant's mood and behavior. Communication skills involve delivering and exchanging information through written, verbal, and nonverbal means (Stewart et al., 2016). Furthermore, soft skills include the capacity to think about how you feel and communicate clearly in front of a group, as well as listening intently, reading nonverbal expressions, and expressing instructions in writing (Asbari et al., 2020). The idea behind soft skills is that they boost competency and consequently enhance one's ability to contribute to community development (Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2016).

Teaching Competencies

Competence is a complicated combination of knowledge, abilities, understandings, values, attitudes, and desires that allow an individual or group to behave purposefully and effectively (Rogers, 2020). Competence refers to the ability and skill of an individual. Competent individuals have the skills or expertise needed to handle the demands of fieldwork in a particular area (Soare, 2015). Competency in education is closely related to such excellent professional performance, and there is a definite association between instructors' professional competence and students' success in the classroom. Teachers have critical roles in the educational process. Teaching competency is a crucial component of an effective training process (Srinivasan & Pugalenti, 2019).

Teaching competency is a teacher's ability, capability, and potential to successfully impart content, concepts, topics, and subject matter (Acevedo & Lazar, 2022). Teaching competency is a pattern of thinking, feeling, behaving, or speaking that increases a teacher's likelihood of performing successfully on the job (Bee & Hie, 2015). Teachers' competencies are divided into nine dimensions, including field, social-cultural, emotional, communication, ICT, and environmental, and determined by several factors, including IQ, socioeconomic status, gender differences, personality traits, social acceptance, academic success, self-control, empathy, sociability, teaching aptitude, emotional intelligence, and adjustment, among others (Kaendler et al., 2015).

Moreover, teaching competency comprises knowledge, attitude, skill, and other traits

(Kang & Park, 2017). Teaching competency comprises introducing a lesson, fluency in questioning, effective communication, explanation skills, lesson speed, relating the lesson to daily life, reinforcing skills, recognizing child behavior, classroom mismanagement, and evaluation skills (Richmond et al., 2021). Teaching competency includes the acquisition and demonstration of the composite skills required for classroom teaching, such as lesson introduction, fluency in questioning, effective communication, explanation skills, lesson pace, skills of linking the lesson to daily life, reinforcement skills, understanding child behavior, classroom mismanagement, and evaluation skills (Kim & Kwak, 2022).

Teachers must have various teaching skills to help students with different learning approaches. These abilities and knowledge contribute to his or her success in the classroom (Sun et al., 2022). The skills and knowledge that allow them to excel in their respective fields are known as teaching competencies. It includes communication and interpersonal skills and qualities like collaboration, teamwork, caring, inclusivity, flexibility, and adaptation (Pandey, 2019).

Relationship Between Soft Skills and Teaching Competencies

For teachers to improve their effectiveness in the classroom, soft skills and teaching competencies are essential for productive interactions and improving a person's career mobility and chances of securing the job they want (Yan et al., 2019). Teachers' competencies influence their schools' values, actions, communication, goals, and practices and support professional development and curriculum development (Soare, 2015). In addition to this, soft skills are of paramount importance to teachers and administrators. In this study, it was found that new teachers would be able to apply their knowledge, talents, and potential. The teachers needed to improve several skills, including verbal and written communication skills (Kanokorn et al., 2014).

Except for the dimensions of knowledge management and soft skills of prospective instructors, teaching competency and its dimensions have a substantial link. As a result, classroom soft skills are closely associated with teaching competency (Succi & Canova, 2020). Soft skills are essential for effectively communicating with students and developing a positive rapport with them and are closely connected to teaching competency (Balakrishnan & Raju, 2015).

Results of the study depicted that students in their fourth year had a more positive view of their soft skills than students in their second and third years (Agcam & Dogan, 2021). Soft skills and teaching competence are substantially connected among undergraduate teaching students, and there are no significant differences in soft skills between male and female B.Ed. Students. Nonetheless, there is a significant difference in teaching competency between male and female B.Ed. Students (Pachaiyappan & Sadayakumar, 2018). Furthermore, the study results showed that secondary-level teachers possess moderate levels of soft skills, which vary significantly according to gender and type of institution but do not differ significantly from those of teachers in their respective localities. It has been found that sharing hard skills positively influences teacher innovation and significantly impacts organizational culture (Mathews & Reddy, 2018).

Conceptual Framework

The focus of this study is to determine if there is a relationship between soft skills and teaching competencies and to identify the soft skills that are most strongly correlated with teaching competencies. In this study, soft skills are considered an independent variable and teaching competencies a dependent variable. Factors of soft skills (teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, adaptability, time management, and communication skills) and factors of teaching competencies (subject mastery, learner psychology, the learning environment, assessment, effective communication, and instructional planning).

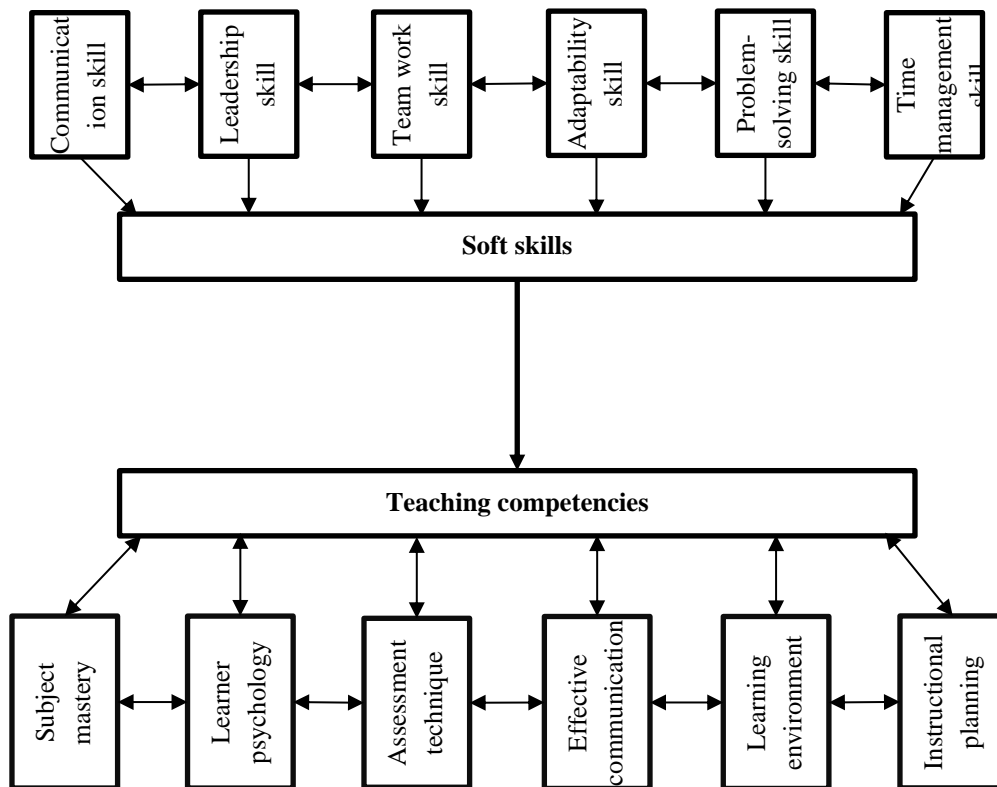


Figure 1 Conceptual framework source researcher

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is a quantitative study that adheres to the positivist paradigm of research. The present study used a correlational design. Correlational research entails gathering information to determine whether and how much a relationship exists between two or more quantitative variables. This study was conducted to determine if there is a correlation between soft skills and the teaching competencies of university teachers. To analyze the data, the researcher used a linear relationship model.

Population and Sample of the Study

The target population of this study included all public-sector university teachers in Punjab. Due to restricted resources and funds, the researchers could only collect data from a few universities in southern Punjab. The cluster sampling method was used to draw a sample for the study. In southern Punjab, three major public sector universities were chosen: Bahauddin Zakariya University in Multan, Islamia University in Bahawalpur, and Ghazi University in Dera Ghazi Khan, where the Departments of Education, English, mathematics, computer science, and management science are located. After that, the researchers chose a representative sample of teachers from various universities and disciplines with the help of a simple random sampling technique. The study involved 152 university teachers.

Research Instruments

A questionnaire was employed as a research method in this study. The questionnaire had three parts: the first was related to the demographic data of participants; the second was associated with soft skills; and the last was teaching competencies. Items of soft skills were based on these fundamental soft skills (teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, adaptability, time management, and communication skills), and items related to teaching competencies were designed based on these competencies: subject mastery, learner psychology, the learning environment, assessment, effective communication, and instructional planning. The final scale had 54 items on a 5-point Likert scale. For instrument

validation, the researchers conducted an expert validation and a pilot study. Expert analysis and recommendations from subject-matter experts led to the deletion of errors. Before administration, a pilot study was carried out to refine the scale further. A Cronbach's alpha test was run in SPSS to verify the dataset's reliability. The scales' overall reliability was 0.83, respectively, and the factor-wise reliability is presented below.

Table 1 Reliability of instruments factors

Factors of Teaching Competencies	No of items	α value
Subject Mastery (SM)	09	0.789
Learner Psychology (LP)	09	0.758
Assessment technique (AT)	09	0.920
Learning Environment (LE)	09	0.940
Effective Communication (EC)	09	0.927
Instructional Planning (IP)	09	0.919
The factor of soft skills		
Teamwork Skill (TW)	10	0.912
Problem-Solving Skill (PB)	11	0.821
Leadership Skill (LP)	09	0.937
Adaptability Skill (AD)	08	0.900
Time Management Skill (TM)	06	0.885
Communication Skill (CK)	09	0.863

The table illustrates the reliability of each factor in the instrument. The alpha values of the teaching competency scale are represented in the table as subject mastery (0.789), learner psychology (0.758), assessment (0.920), learning environment (0.940), effective communication (0.927), and instructional planning (0.919). Teamwork skills (0.912), problem-solving skills (0.821), leadership skills (0.937), adaptation skills (0.900), time management skills (0.885), and communication skills (0.863) were all substantially greater than 0.70. This implies that all the components were highly connected, demonstrating the internal consistency of the scale items.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Surveys were used to get data from the respondents. The data received from respondents using instruments were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The researcher used mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis for descriptive statistics and Pearson's product-moment correlation and regression for inferential statistics.

RESULTS OF STUDY

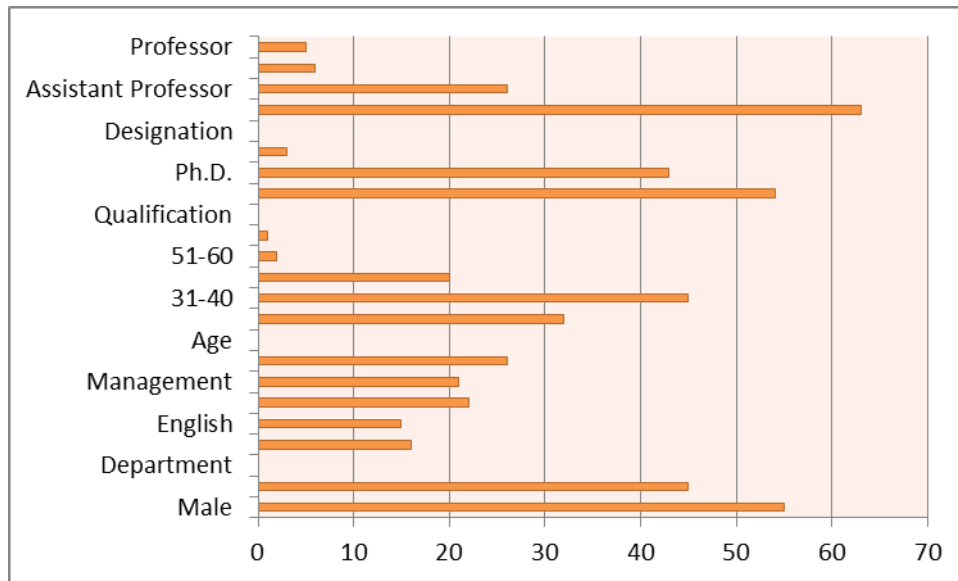


Figure 2 Descriptive statistics of demographic variables

Figure 1 shows the percentage distribution of respondents (teachers) based on gender, age, designation, department, qualifications, and teaching experience. Figure values revealed that 55% of respondents were male teachers and 45% were female teachers, and there were three age categories (21–30), 31–40), and 41–50); however, the majority of respondents (45%, n = 68) were between the ages of 31 and 40. According to the table, teachers' qualifications are split into MS/M. Phil. and PhD groups and post-doctoral groups are largely MS/M.Phil. (54%, n = 82) groups rather than Ph.D. (43%, n = 27) and post-doc (3%, n = 5). The study's participants were mostly computer science department staff, with the bulk of them lecturers.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics of teaching competencies and soft skills factors

	Mean	S. D	Skewness	Kurtosis		
Factors	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Error
SM	34.2781	8.37071	-.839	6.809	.197	.392
LP	33.5329	8.08639	-1.609	3.333	.197	.391
AT	33.8808	7.29559	-2.004	5.830	.197	.392
EC	33.5461	7.94838	-1.997	4.515	.197	.391
IP	33.6424	7.47827	-1.914	4.960	.197	.392
EL	34.5987	7.96953	-2.067	5.188	.197	.391
TW	37.9079	7.87431	-1.919	6.202	.197	.391
PB	41.3026	9.58547	-1.498	4.870	.197	.391
AD	28.7947	7.35420	-1.200	1.945	.197	.392
TM	21.2133	5.90596	-1.206	1.317	.198	.394
CK	34.0987	8.53179	-1.339	3.036	.197	.391

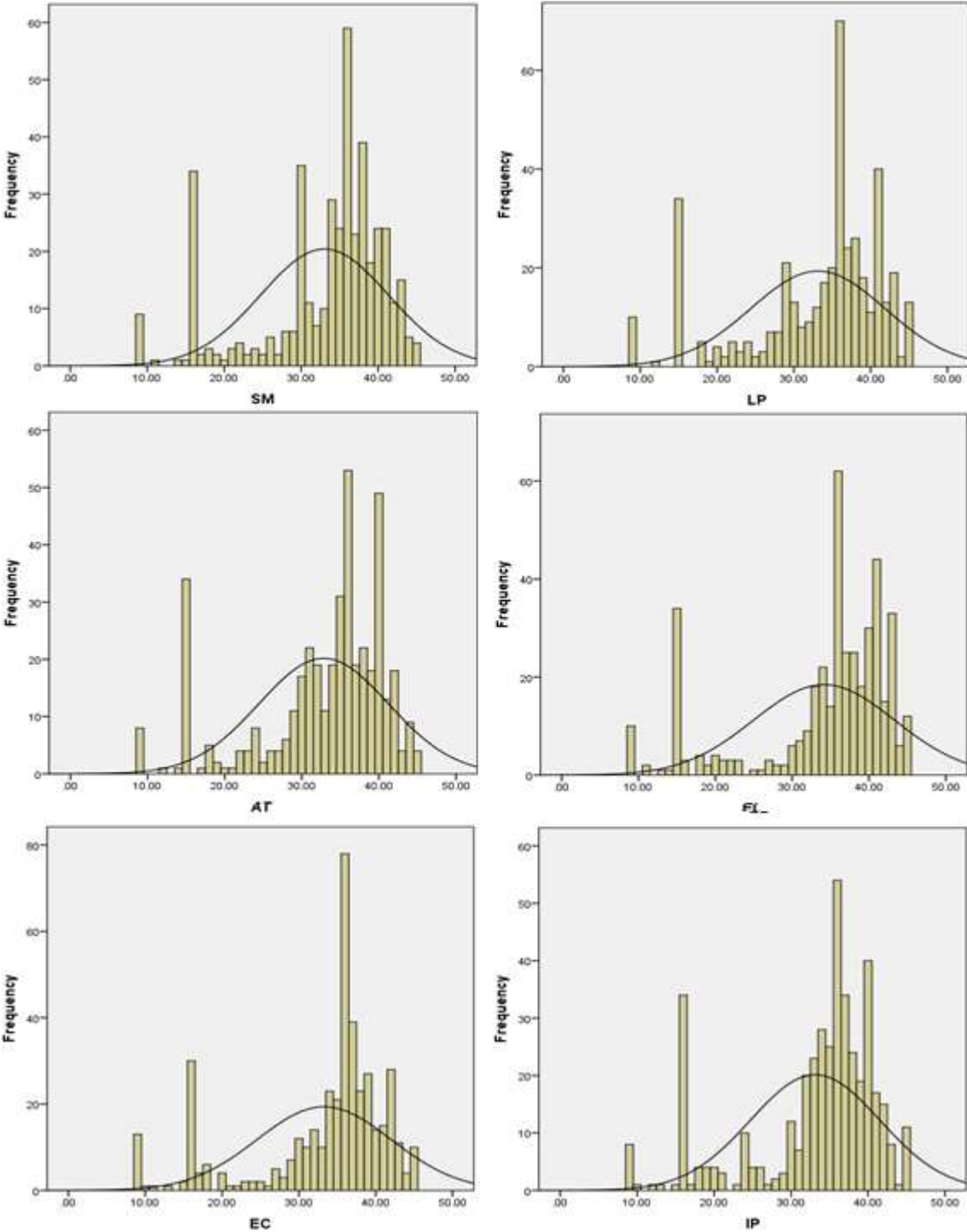


Figure 3 Teaching Competencies

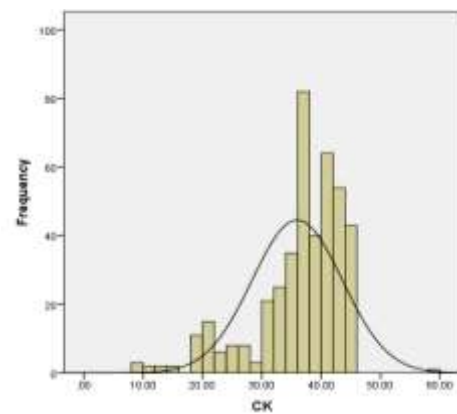
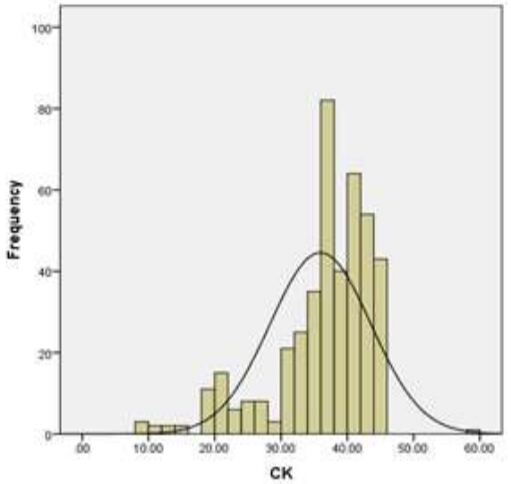
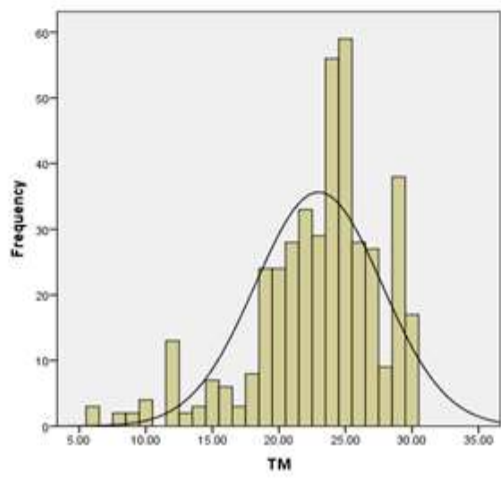
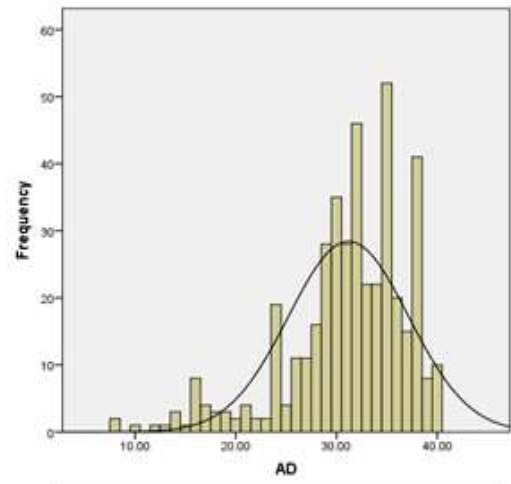
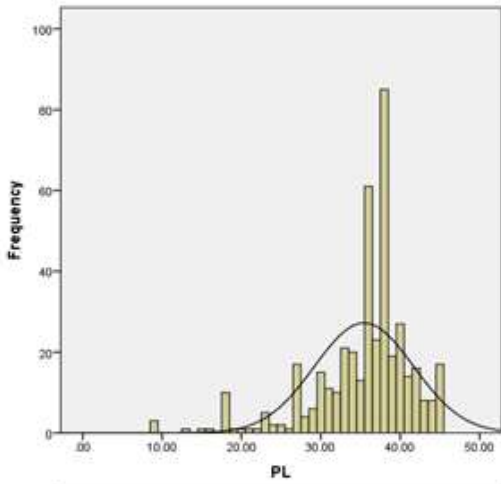
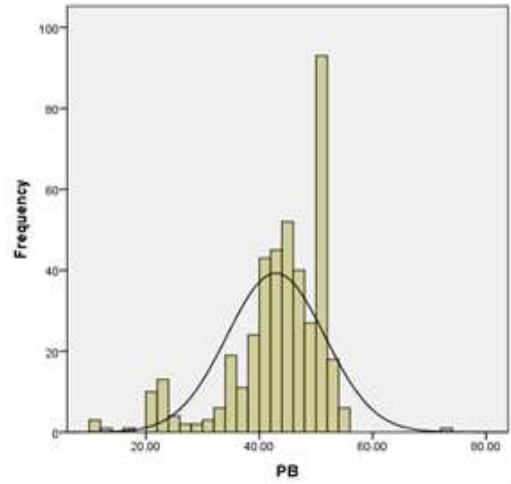
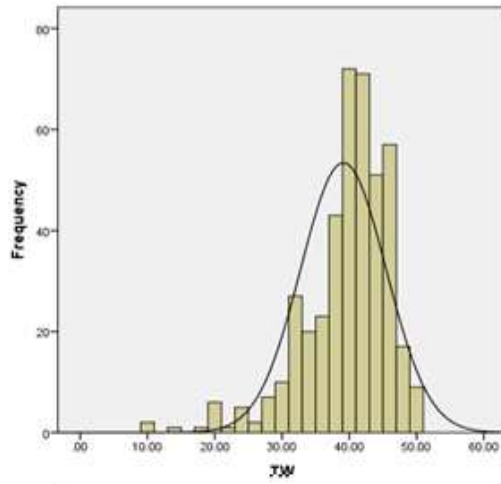


Figure 4 Soft Skills

The table results show that acceptable skewness values were between 3 and +3, and acceptable kurtosis values were between 10 and +10 (Brown & Greene, 2006). It shows that all the values of the factors fall within an acceptable range, which also shows the normality of the data.

Table 3 Intercorrelation among factors (teaching competencies and soft skills)

	Subject Mastery(SM)	Learner Psychology(LP)	Assessment Technique(AT)	Learning Environment(LE)	Effective Communication(EC)	Instructional Planning(IP)	Teamwork Skill(TW)	Problem-Solving Skill(PB)	Adaptability Skill(AD)	Time Management Skill™	Communication Skill(CK)	Leadership Skill(LP)
Subject Mastery(SM)	1	0.61	0.79	0.81	0.78	0.8	0.69	0.66	0.65	0.59	0.6	0.62
Learner Psychology(LP)	0.61	1	0.69	0.7	0.66	0.62	0.75	0.79	0.82	0.8	0.82	0.72
Assessment Technique(AT)	0.79	0.69	1	0.87	0.83	0.79	0.77	0.72	0.67	0.63	0.6	0.68
Learning Environment(LE)	0.81	0.7	0.87	1	0.88	0.87	0.77	0.74	0.71	0.69	0.61	0.77
Effective Communication(EC)	0.78	0.66	0.83	0.88	1	0.82	0.75	0.72	0.64	0.67	0.59	0.82
Instructional Planning(IP)	0.8	0.62	0.79	0.87	0.82	1	0.68	0.65	0.67	0.62	0.59	0.71
Teamwork Skill(TW)	0.69	0.75	0.77	0.77	0.75	0.68	1	0.84	0.7	0.71	0.72	0.64
Problem-Solving Skill(PB)	0.66	0.79	0.72	0.74	0.72	0.65	0.84	1	0.7	0.7	0.66	0.69
Adaptability Skill(AD)	0.65	0.82	0.67	0.71	0.64	0.67	0.7	0.7	1	0.79	0.77	0.74
Time Management Skill™	0.59	0.8	0.63	0.69	0.67	0.62	0.71	0.7	0.79	1	0.79	0.75
Communication Skill(CK)	0.6	0.82	0.6	0.61	0.59	0.59	0.72	0.66	0.77	0.79	1	0.67
Leadership Skill(LP)	0.62	0.72	0.68	0.77	0.82	0.71	0.64	0.69	0.74	0.75	0.67	1

The correlation matrix between the variables is shown in the table above. All variables have positive correlations (correlations are significant at the 0.01 level, two-tailed). There is a strong correlation between all the factors. It was observed that all the correlations ranged from 0.59 to 0.882, indicating that each component or factor of the scale was internally consistent. It was determined that there was a correlation between soft skills and teaching competencies among university teachers by using the Pearson correlation coefficient.

Table 4 Regression analysis

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.863 ^a	.744	.742	21.38249

Predictors: (Constant), SK

The table shows a model summary of university teachers' soft skills (SK) and teaching competencies (TC). The R2 value of 0.8663 shows that SK explains nearly 86% of the variation in TC. So, TC increased 86% of the total variation in SK, which shows that the two variables are strongly linked positively.

Table 5 ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	192876.024	1	192876.024	421.854	.000 ^b
	Residual	66295.581	145	457.211		
	Total	259171.605	146			

Dependent Variable: TC

Predictors: (Constant), SK

The table provides an ANOVA summary of teaching competencies and soft skills, with the F value indicating that soft skills significantly contribute to university teachers' teaching competencies. As a result, H0, which states that there is no significant relationship between

soft skills and teaching competencies of university teachers, is rejected.

Table 6 Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	33.049	8.525		3.877	.000
	SK	.866	.042	.863	20.539	.000

Dependent Variable: TC

The table summarizes the soft skills and teaching competencies coefficients. The value of $\beta = .960$ has a t value of 63.476, which is significant. This also confirms that soft skills significantly contribute to the teaching competencies of university teachers.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted at three universities and limited to only 152 teachers. Therefore, the findings may only generalize to some university teachers in Pakistan. Furthermore, only permanent university teachers were included in the study as a sample. Thirdly, this study only included teaching competencies explained in Pakistan's national professional standards, and for soft skills, UNSECO and WHO indicators were used. Fourthly, this study was limited only to universities in southern Punjab. Lastly, since this was a correlation study, the associations among these variables could not represent causal relationships.

CONCLUSION

The current study focused on the relationship between university teachers' soft skills and teaching competencies. The results indicated that a statistically significant relationship exists between soft skills and teaching competencies and that the relationship between the different dimensions of soft skills and teaching competencies is also significant. The research also demonstrated that university teachers generally hold favourable views of their soft skills and are most confident with their teaching competencies. However, a more detailed analysis of their responses to the items related to teaching competencies and soft skills demonstrated that participants responded positively to all the items on both scales. The study's findings also show that improving teachers' soft skills improves their competencies, improving education quality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The scope of this study is limited to investigating the soft skills of a limited number of university teachers in southern Punjab. The study also analyses data obtained through self-developed questions about soft skills and teaching competencies. Students' soft skills and teaching competencies can be investigated using other data collection methods, such as structured semi-structured interviews. The participants' views can be analyzed through content analysis to understand the issue better. In a further comparative study, it may be possible to examine whether soft skills differ significantly between public and private sector university teachers. Additionally, comparing the soft skills of in-service and pre-service teachers might provide insight into whether teaching practices influence the development of these skills.

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