

THE INFLUENCE OF SOFT SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAMS ON THE SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT OF SALES EMPLOYEES: A STUDY IN SAGAR, MADHYA PRADESH**Manish Shrivastava**, Research Scholar**Dr. Neha Mathur**

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Abstract - This study aimed to investigate the influence of soft skills training programs on the soft skill development of sales employees in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh. The research methodology involved utilizing the theoretical framework proposed by Astin (1993) to examine the growth of learners' skills before and after the intervention. The study focused on 11 skill categories, including general knowledge, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication skills, leadership abilities, and job-related skills. The assessment of participants' soft skills was based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, which categorized skills into various intelligences such as linguistic intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, and interpersonal intelligence. The analysis involved conducting T-test evaluations for different skill components. For linguistic ability, the results showed a significant improvement in participants' formal communication skills after the training program. There was a statistically significant difference between the mean pre-test scores and the mean post-test scores, indicating a positive impact on participants' language proficiency. Furthermore, the study found that there was no significant difference between the participants' overall linguistic ability as measured by the mean post-test scores and their delayed post-test scores, suggesting that the improvements in linguistic ability were sustained over time. These findings emphasize the effectiveness of the soft skills training program in enhancing employees' formal communication abilities and language proficiency. The implications of this study suggest that investing in soft skills training can have a positive influence on sales employees' soft skill development, leading to improved job performance and effectiveness in their roles. However, it is important to conduct further research to assess the impact of soft skills training on other skill categories and to evaluate the overall effectiveness of such programs in enhancing the soft skill development of sales employees in diverse contexts.

Keywords: soft skills training, sales employees, soft skill development, Sagar, Madhya Pradesh, Astin framework, multiple intelligences, linguistic intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, spatial intelligence.

1 INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive business environment, the significance of soft skills in the sales industry has become increasingly evident. Soft skills encompass a wide range of interpersonal, communication, and behavioral attributes that enable individuals to interact effectively with others. For sales employees, these skills are essential for building relationships with clients, understanding their needs, and closing deals successfully. However, despite their importance, many sales professionals face challenges in developing and applying these soft skills in their daily interactions.

To address this issue, organizations often implement soft skills training programs to enhance the capabilities of their sales teams. These

training initiatives aim to equip sales employees with the necessary skills and knowledge to engage with customers more effectively, ultimately leading to improved sales performance and customer satisfaction.

1.1 Significance and Rationale for Conducting the Research in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh:

The choice of Sagar, Madhya Pradesh, as the research location is based on several factors that make it an intriguing setting for studying the influence of soft skills training programs on sales employee development. Firstly, Sagar is a rapidly growing city with a thriving business community, and the sales industry plays a pivotal role in its economic

development. Understanding the impact of soft skills training on sales employees in this context can have broader implications for similar regions.

Secondly, while soft skills training programs have been widely studied in metropolitan areas, their effectiveness in semi-urban or rural regions like Sagar remains relatively unexplored. The cultural and socio-economic dynamics of such areas may differ significantly from urban centers, necessitating a localized study to determine the training program's effectiveness.

Thirdly, Sagar is home to diverse industries, each with distinct sales requirements. Analyzing the nature of influence of soft skills training across different sectors can provide valuable insights into tailoring training programs to specific industry needs.

1.2 Research Objectives:

The primary objective of this research is to assess the nature of influence of soft skills training programs on the soft skill development of sales employees in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh. To achieve this overarching goal, the following specific objectives will be pursued:

- a. To evaluate the effectiveness of existing soft skills training programs in Sagar.
- b. To identify the most crucial soft skills that significantly impact sales performance.
- c. To understand the challenges faced by sales employees in applying soft skills in their interactions with clients.
- d. To explore the perception of sales managers regarding the importance of soft skills in achieving sales targets.
- e. To provide practical recommendations for optimizing soft skills training programs to better meet the needs of sales employees and the local industry.

1.3 Research Questions:

To address the research objectives effectively, the study will seek answers to the following research questions:

- a. RQ1: How effective are the current soft skills training programs in Sagar in enhancing the soft skill development of sales employees?

- b. RQ2: Which specific soft skills (e.g., communication, negotiation, adaptability) have the most significant influence on sales performance in Sagar?
- c. RQ3: What are the primary challenges faced by sales employees in utilizing their soft skills during customer interactions?
- d. RQ4: How do sales managers perceive the role of soft skills in achieving sales targets, and do they consider these skills essential for their team's success?
- e. RQ5: Based on the findings, what recommendations can be made to improve the effectiveness of soft skills training programs for sales employees in Sagar?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Soft Skills:

There is no comprehensive list of talents or overarching word for these skills, leading to different interpretations and perspectives. One area of disagreement is whether "skill" is a suitable term for the kind of traits or aptitudes covered by the phrase "soft skills" (Hurrell, Scholarios, & Thompson, 2012).

Nishi (2013) suggests that soft skills are more like habits that are developed over time rather than being inborn qualities. These skills are highly valued by companies, who often struggle to recruit new hires possessing these desired traits. Employers look for individuals with integrity, responsibility, effective communication, and the ability to follow instructions (Symonds, 2011). Additionally, employers seek candidates with interpersonal qualities such as a sense of humor, self-control, creativity, adaptability, perceptiveness, and the ability to see the "big picture" (Symonds, 2011). Lack of soft skills can lead to significant challenges and setbacks in academic and employment performance.

Musa et al. (2012) categorize soft skills as a "general attribute" and include teamwork, communication, and problem-solving as examples. Other researchers, such as Levasseur (2013), divide soft skills into categories such as personal skills, interpersonal skills, group skills, and organizational skills.

2.2 Building Soft Skills:

The development of soft skills can be achieved through various means. One approach is project-based learning, which involves applying real-world scenarios to problem-solving related to the workplace. This method helps students develop both technical and soft skills, including problem-solving and conflict resolution abilities (Musa et al., 2012).

Hands-on experience is another effective way to acquire soft skills. Although less structured than project-based learning, students still need motivation and dedication to successfully develop soft skills (Levasseur, 2013). Volunteer work has been found to be an effective method for developing soft skills, such as improved communication, teamwork, transparency, and project management (Khasanzyanova, 2017).

Cooperative learning and experiential learning also contribute to the development of soft skills. Collaborative learning can enhance interpersonal and group dynamics skills, while immersive learning methodologies can help students develop leadership, bravery, and risk-taking abilities (Dyson & Plunkett, 2012; Naufalin, Dinanti, & Krisnaesanti, 2017).

2.3 Soft Skills Training Programs:

Soft skills training programs aim to enhance individuals' soft skill capabilities. Ingols and Shapiro (2014) found that incorporating and evaluating soft skills in MBA programs, such as providing specific feedback from faculty and internship supervisors, was valuable in meeting employers' demands for graduates with soft skills. The effectiveness of offline and online soft skills training programs has also been studied, with face-to-face formats often resulting in higher motivation and understanding of soft skills (Charoensap-Kelly et al., 2016).

Anthony and Garner (2016) explored different techniques for teaching soft skills, such as self-analysis activities, interviews with professionals, guest speakers, reading materials, and videos. The students found guest lectures and assignments applicable to real-world situations to be the most helpful. However, Levasseur (2013) argues that training programs alone may not provide

the self-reflection and feedback necessary for complete soft skill development.

2.4 Soft Skills and Employability:

Research emphasizes the significance of soft skills in the workplace. Employers highly value individuals who are creative, sociable, and possess strong soft skills, often considering them more important than technical expertise (Azim et al., 2010; Beard et al., 2008; Bryant, 2011). A posttest experimental design with one control group was used as the research design for the investigation. In Sagar, Madhya Pradesh, sales employees participated in a study to see how a soft skills training programme affected their development of soft skills. One group was designated as the experimental group, and the other as the control group. The control group included employees who did not get any special training, while the experimental group included employees who participated in the soft skills training programme.

Only those employees who were comparable in terms of key demographic criteria, such as education level, age group, gender, and economic background, were included in the study to ensure that the groups were homogeneous. The study focused on sales employees with reference to Sagar, Madhya Pradesh.

Both the control and experimental groups were drawn from the same institutes in order to account for auxiliary variables. Other unrelated factors, such as parental style and institute setting, were considered to have an equal and comparable effect on both groups.

A soft skills scale questionnaire was employed in the study, and it was given to both the experimental and control groups before and after the intervention. A t-test was employed in the study's statistical analysis to compare the mean scores of the experimental group's pre- and post-tests to the mean scores of the control group.

2.5 Sample Size

Using a straightforward random sampling technique, a total sample size of 120 employees—60 in the control group and 60 in the experimental group—was used. With a power of 0.80 and a significance level of $p = 0.05$, this sample size was deemed sufficient to produce a

statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups.

2.6 Data Collection Approach

Employers' soft skills scale was used to gauge the employee' soft talents. There were 25 questions on the scale covering several soft skills subsets. It was a five-point scale, and it was scored in such a way that the sum of each respondent's scores on the scale revealed the value of their overall soft skills.

2.7 Descriptive Data Analysis for Overall Scores

Descriptive data analysis was conducted to examine the overall scores of the participants before and after the soft skills training program. The study included 43 sales employees from various companies in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh. Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the overall scores.

Table 1 Descriptive Data Analysis for Overall Scores

Components	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Pre-training	43	8.0	39.0	23.279	7.9555
Post-training	43	26.5	73.0	44.674	8.7368
Delayed Post-training	43	36.0	70.0	52.384	7.5300

The results indicate a significant improvement in the overall scores of the sales employees following the soft skills training program. The mean scores of the pre-training phase were lower (M=23.279) compared to the post-training phase (M=44.674), and both pre-training and post-training scores were lower than the delayed post-training scores (M=52.384).

2.8 Descriptive Data Analysis for Oral and Written Scores

Further analysis was conducted to assess the oral and written scores of the participants before and after the training program. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the oral and written scores separately.

Table 2 Descriptive Data Analysis for Oral and Written Scores

Components	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Pre-training Oral	43	0	18.0	7.465	8.256
Pre-training Written	43	24.0	15.814	7.954	
Post-training Oral	43	10.0	39.0	23.070	5.869
Post-training Written	43	10.5	34.0	21.605	5.177
Delayed Post-training Oral	43	19.0	37.0	27.326	4.719
Delayed Post-training Written	43	16.5	35.0	25.058	4.755

The findings reveal consistent improvement in both oral and written scores of the sales employees following the soft skills training program. The mean scores for the oral and written assessments increased from pre-training to post-training, and further increased from post-training to delayed post-training.

2.9 T-Test Analysis for Overall Scores

To determine the significance of the differences between the pre-training and post-training, post-training and delayed post-training, and pre-training and delayed post-training scores, t-test analysis was performed. The effect size (r-value) was also calculated to

Table 3 T-Test Analysis for Overall Scores

Comparisons	t-value	df	p-value	Effect Size (r)
Pre-training vs. Post-training	-6.289	42	<0.001	0.731
Post-training vs. Delayed Post-training	-5.942	42	<0.001	0.703
Pre-training vs. Delayed Post-training	-12.178	42	<0.001	0.917

The results of the t-test analysis indicate that the differences in overall scores between pre-training and post-training, post-training and delayed post-training, and pre-training and delayed post-training are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the effect sizes (r-

values) indicate a large magnitude of the observed differences in all comparisons, suggesting a substantial impact of the soft skills training program on the soft skill development of sales employees in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh.

Table 4 Pre-test and Post-test Scores for Linguistic Ability

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Paired Differences	-6.51	4.64
Std. Error Mean	0.71	
95% Confidence		
Interval of		
the Difference	Lower	-7.94
	Upper	-5.08
t	-9.2	
df	42	
Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.0001	

The results of the t-test analysis for linguistic ability indicate a significant difference between the mean pre-test scores and the mean post-test scores. The p-value of 0.0001, which is lower than the significance level of 0.05, suggests a

statistically significant difference. The t-value of -9.2 at 42 degrees of freedom further supports this finding. The analysis shows that the post-test scores (M = 19.465) are significantly higher than the pre-test scores (M = 12.954).

Table 5 Post-test and Delayed Post-test Scores for Linguistic Ability

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Paired Differences	-1.71	3.56
Std. Error Mean	0.54	
95% Confidence		
Interval of		
the Difference	Lower	-2.80
	Upper	-0.61
t	-3.15	

The table presents the comparison between the mean post-test scores and the mean delayed post-test scores for linguistic ability. The analysis shows that there is no statistically significant difference between these two measures. The t-value of -3.15 at an unknown degrees of freedom indicates a lack of significant change in linguistic ability between the post-test and the delayed post-test.

2.10 Qualitative Data Analysis

In addition to quantitative analysis, qualitative data was collected through interviews with a subset of the participants. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes related to the perceived impact of the soft skills training program. The qualitative findings highlighted the following key themes:

- **Improved Communication:** Participants reported enhanced communication skills, including active listening, effective verbal and written communication, and the ability to convey ideas clearly and persuasively.
- **Customer Engagement:** Sales employees expressed increased confidence in engaging with customers, building rapport, and understanding customer needs,

resulting in improved customer satisfaction and sales performance.

- **Team Collaboration:** The training program emphasized teamwork and collaboration, leading to better coordination among sales teams, improved relationships with colleagues, and a positive work environment.
- **Personal Growth:** Participants mentioned personal growth, including increased self-awareness, confidence, and motivation. They also emphasized the positive impact of the training on their overall professional development.

3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study indicate that the soft skills training program had a significant and positive influence on the soft skill development of sales employees in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh. The quantitative analysis demonstrated improvements in overall scores, as well as oral and written scores, following the training program. The effect sizes indicated a substantial impact of the training. Additionally, the qualitative analysis revealed themes related to improved communication, customer engagement, team collaboration, and personal growth.

These findings suggest that investing in soft skills training programs can be beneficial for sales employees in enhancing their soft skills, which in turn can contribute to their professional success and the overall performance of the organizations they work for in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh.

4 CONCLUSION

Based on the T-test analysis for linguistic ability, the study found the following conclusions:

1. The participants' level of language proficiency significantly improved after the soft skills training program. The mean post-test scores were significantly higher than the mean pre-test scores, indicating a positive impact of the intervention on employees' formal communication abilities, including verbal and written communication, public speaking, and meeting participation.
2. There was no statistically significant difference between the participants' overall linguistic ability as measured by the mean post-test scores and their linguistic ability as measured by the mean delayed post-test scores. This suggests that the improvements in linguistic ability were sustained over time, and there was no significant decline in language proficiency after the training program. These findings support the effectiveness of the soft skills training program in enhancing employees' language proficiency and formal communication skills. The significant improvement in linguistic ability highlights the positive influence of the training program on the development of soft skills among sales employees in Sagar, Madhya Pradesh.

It is important to note that these conclusions are based on the analysis of the specific linguistic ability component scores and may not generalize to other soft skill components or populations. Further analysis and research are recommended to explore the impact of soft skills training on other skill categories and to assess the overall effectiveness of such programs in improving sales employees' soft skill development.

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