

Teachers' Perception of Teaching and Assessing Soft Skills in Secondary Schools

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Abstract Soft skills are the generic skills that integrate both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. The inability of secondary school graduates to demonstrate soft skills has become a source of concern to education stakeholders. Students are unable to link classroom outcomes to real life situation because they lack the requisite soft skills. The ability to apply cognitive and psychomotor gains from classroom interaction to daily living should be embedded in teaching through the inclusion of soft skills in the taught curriculum. This study, therefore, investigated teachers' perception of teaching and assessing soft skills in the Secondary School setting. The following skills were considered: note taking, study habit, daily review of notes, organisational, communication, team work and leadership skills. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 120 teachers from 24 schools in 6 Local government areas. Three valid instruments were used to collect data on teaching and assessing soft skills and ways of teaching soft skills respectively. The data were analysed using descriptive and t-test statistics. Findings were: male and female teachers perceived soft skills as highly teachable and assessable. There was no significant difference between male and female teachers' perceptions about the ways of teaching soft skills. Both male and female teachers agreed that the skills could be more easily assessed using essay questions, assignment, project, case studies, etc than utilizing objective questions. All stakeholders should come together to formulate policy that will engender the teaching and assessment of soft skills. Teachers should also be trained to teach and assess soft skills at all levels of education.

Keywords Policy formulation, Curriculum, Teaching soft skills, Assessing soft skills

1. Introduction

One of the most important challenges facing the contemporary world is the fight against poverty and this is a battle that governments, agencies and institutions have been fighting over the last several decades. The problem persists because hard skills have been given more recognition at the expense of soft skills. Hard skills are those skills that are specific to a particular career field or job while soft skills are those skills and personal traits which may be useful for performing any job, no matter the field of any human endeavours. Downing (2005) defines hard skill as the knowledge needed to perform a particular job. According to him, hard skills include knowing how to write an effective business plan, and what the current inheritance laws are. These are the skills that are taught in courses in major field of study. He went further to say that soft skills will help one succeed in his/her first career after college.

Amanda (2014) observes that while soft skills are difficult to quantify on a resume, hard skills are easily quantified and may be validated to the potential employer on a resume. Soft

skills are personal attributes that enhance an individual's interactions, job performance and career prospects which are unlike hard skills, which are about a person's physical skills set and ability to perform a certain type of task or activity. It is possible for one to be academically sound and not being able to impart the knowledge if he/she is lacking in soft skills. While hard skills permit rote learning, soft skills do not.

Students who possess these skills have the potential of performing well at school while paving the way to good relationships in all areas of their life. When compared to hard skills, soft skills are highly valued by teachers and administrators because they are hard to find. Soft skills encompasses much more than personality, including traits like communicating with both techies and non-techies; the ability to plan and organize; drive and initiative; hitting budget and schedule deadlines; influencing and collaborating on technical and non-technical issues with all types of people; balancing and prioritizing work; dealing with changing circumstances; dependability; and coaching and team development, to name a few.

Soft skills is a sociological term relating to a person's Emotional Intelligence Quotient (EIQ), the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, friendliness and optimism that characterise relationships with other people. Soft skills complement hard skills part of a person's IQ, which are the occupational

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Published online at <http://journal.sapub.org/edu>

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requirements of a job and many other activities. Reports from various professional organizations and individuals have examined the changing demands of accounting and information technology professionals (Todd, McKeen & Gallupe, 1995; Wade & Parent 2001/2002). In fact, Aworanti (2012) observes that hard skills may get someone an interview but soft skills will be needed to get and keep the job.

Bernd (2008) opines that soft skills fulfil an important role in shaping an individual's personality by complementing his/her hard skills. However, over-emphasising it to such an extent should not taint the importance of soft skills, that hard skills, i.e. expert knowledge in certain fields, are demoted to secondary importance. Because soft skills are critical for productive performance in today's workplace, current and future business leaders are emphasizing the development of soft skills (Nealy, 2005). While technical skills are a part of many excellent educational curricula, soft skills need further emphasis in the university curricula so that students learn the importance of soft skills early in their academic programs before they embark on a business career (Wellington, 2005). Teamwork as a soft skill do not only help teachers share information but also help new teachers in mentoring programme with teaching skills, methods and lesson plans (Millinger, 2004). Thacker and Yost (2002) note that students need to be trained to be effective team members as employers often find that graduates lack good team leadership skills. It is not as employee that soft skills will be useful to a student, but as a learner. Soft skills therefore should be taught and assessed in secondary schools so as to help students be effective even in acquiring hard skills.

From the foregoing, it is worthy to note that there is need to teach soft skills in Secondary schools to inculcate these skills in our students. Aricia (2013) explained that soft skills are developed over time, it is important for teachers, counselors, and parents to work together to help students acquire these skills early. Through modeling, the use of puzzles, books, and other resources, students can learn soft skills. The easiest and most valuable way to instill these skills is to model them. When students see their parents, counselors, teachers and other adults demonstrate these skills they not only understand the value and feel inspired to adopt them, they see how and when to apply them. For example, when teachers work through an issue together with students in their classroom, students see how compromise and negotiation work. On the other hand, teachers can demonstrate the soft skill of optimism, by acknowledging a problem while at the same time identifying the silver lining in the situation and sharing it with the class. Practice in the classroom is best done with real life scenarios that the student can role play. For example,

- team project dynamics
- friendship conflicts
- communication issues with parents
- peer pressure

Superlei (2011) observes that the theorist during the early

1990's discussed soft skills from a management perspective; and that it was discussed as the hidden value (or skill) that organisations could offer. This perspective according to him has now changed, to one of marketing theory, discussed in areas such as relationship marketing and customer value. This opinion by marketers is that by encouraging soft skills in employees it will add value to the product. The concern of this study is that if soft skills can be encouraged in schools, there will be better performance among the students as the soft skills mentioned in this study will be of great help to them. Ilangko (2013) opines that soft skills acquisition is expected to mould positive changes in students in their character building, control of feelings, self -motivation, ability to think critically and creatively, in interacting with others as well as the ability to work as a team.

Teaching soft skills is much more of an art than a science. However, there is need to appropriately measure and assess performance of students in relation to soft skills development though it is a tough one but many people are attempting to figure it out. First and foremost, there is need to understand the meaning and principles of assessment.

Assessment is the wide variety of methods that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, and skill acquisition of students from preschool through college to adulthood.

It has become imperative to find out how students and teachers who are major planks of the critical stakeholders in the teaching and learning of soft skills perceive teaching and learning of soft skills in the Nigerian context as this has not been known to have been ascertained. It is, therefore, in the light of the foregoing that this investigated teachers' perception of teaching and assessing soft skills in the Secondary School setting especially in Ogun State, Nigeria. The following soft skills which are critical in learning were considered in the study: note taking, study habit, daily review of notes, organisational, communication, team work and leadership.

- Formulating Statements of Intended Learning Outcomes – statements describing intentions about what students should know, understand, and be able to do with their knowledge when they graduate.
- Developing or Selecting Assessment Measures – designing or selecting data gathering measures to assess whether or not our intended learning outcomes have been achieved. This includes
 - o Direct assessments – projects, products, papers/theses, exhibitions, performances, case studies, clinical evaluations, portfolios, interviews, and oral exams – which ask students to demonstrate what they know or can do with their knowledge.
 - o Indirect assessments – self-report measures such as surveys – in which respondents share their perceptions about what graduates know or can do with their knowledge.
- Creating Experiences Leading to Outcomes – ensuring that students have experiences both in and outside their

courses that help them achieve the intended learning outcomes.

- Discussing and Using Assessment Results to Improve Teaching and Learning – using the results to improve individual student performance.

It has become imperative to find how students and teachers who are actually the major critical stakeholders in the teaching and learning as well as assessment of soft skills perceive the teaching and assessment of soft skills in our clime since little is known to have been done in this regard. It is in the light of the foregoing that this study investigated critical stakeholders' perception of teaching and assessing soft skills as well as the ways they can be taught in the Secondary School setting especially in Ogun State, Nigeria. The following soft skills were considered in this study: note taking, study habit, daily review of notes, organisational ability, communication, team work and leadership.

Research question:

1. What is the teachers' perception of: i) the teachability of, ii) ways of teaching soft skills and iii) assessing soft skills?

Hypotheses:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception of Teaching soft skills

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception of assessing soft skills

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between male and female teachers' perception of the ways of teaching of soft skills

2. Methodology

Research Design

Survey design of the ex-post-facto type was adopted for the study as the researchers did not manipulate any of the independent variables.

Sampling and Sample

Multi-staged sampling techniques was used for the study. Ogun State of Nigeria was clustered along the existing three senatorial districts in the State. Two local government areas [LGAs] were randomly selected from each senatorial districts. Four schools were thereafter selected from each of the LGAs totalling twenty-four schools. Five teachers were randomly selected from each school. This gave a total of 120 teacher participants.

Instrumentation

Three valid instruments were used. Their psychometric properties are indicated against each of them. The instruments are namely: Teachers' Perception of Assessing Soft Skills Questionnaire (TPASSQ) ($r = 0.71$ and $CVR=0.68$); Perception of Teaching Soft Skills Questionnaire (PTSSQ) ($r = 0.74$ and $CVR = 0.73$) and Perception of the Ways of Teaching Soft (PWTS) ($r = 0.70$ and $CVR=0.72$). These instruments were administered on

thirty non-participating teachers from the study population in the main study during the validation exercise. They were administered twice within a week interval on these trial samples and data were subjected to Pearson product moment correlation statistic and the Lawshe's content validity ratio (CVR) to obtain the aforementioned psychometric properties.

Procedure for data collection

Five trained research assistants were employed for the data collection exercise. This is in addition to two of the researchers. Their training lasted for two days. The researchers and their research assistants distributed copies of the questionnaires to the respondents, explaining the rubrics of the questionnaires to the respondents. After the administration of the instruments, the researchers and the assistants respectively collected the instruments for data collation, scoring and analysis.

Data analysis

Data for this study was analysed using descriptive and t-test statistics.

3. Results and Discussion

Teachers' perception on question 1

Figures 1 to 3 present the perception of teachers on (i) teachability of soft skills, (ii) ways of teaching soft skills and (iii) assessing soft skills.

From figure 1, all the outlined elements of soft skills as "teachable" of soft skills were variously perceived by 65.4% to 89.2% as valid to make soft skills teachable in the secondary school setting in our clime while 10.8% to 34.6% of them perceived these skills as not "teachable". This finding implies that majority of the teachers believe that all soft skills shown in Figure 1 are teachable in Nigerian secondary schools. This result corroborates the submission of Aricia (2013) that soft skills are developed over time and that it is important for teachers, counselors, and parents to work together to help students acquire these skills early. Aricia is of the opinion that soft skills can be taught not only by the teachers, but also by the parents and counsellors. The finding also agrees with the observation of Aworanti's (2012) finding that hard skills may get someone to be interviewed but not a job except s/he also have sufficient quantum of soft skills which are needed to get him/her the job as well as to enable him/her to keep the job.

The result disagrees with the opinion of Laker and Powell (2011) who said that soft skills are much more difficult to be transferred in practice. It can be deduced that for those who feel that they cannot be taught, soft skills to them are innate attributes that are not easy to be taught and that such thought need not be entertained. They are thus, averse to innovation in teaching, forgetting that the only that remain constant is change. Whereas, the teaching of soft skills is a way of adapting to the dynamic world in which we live.

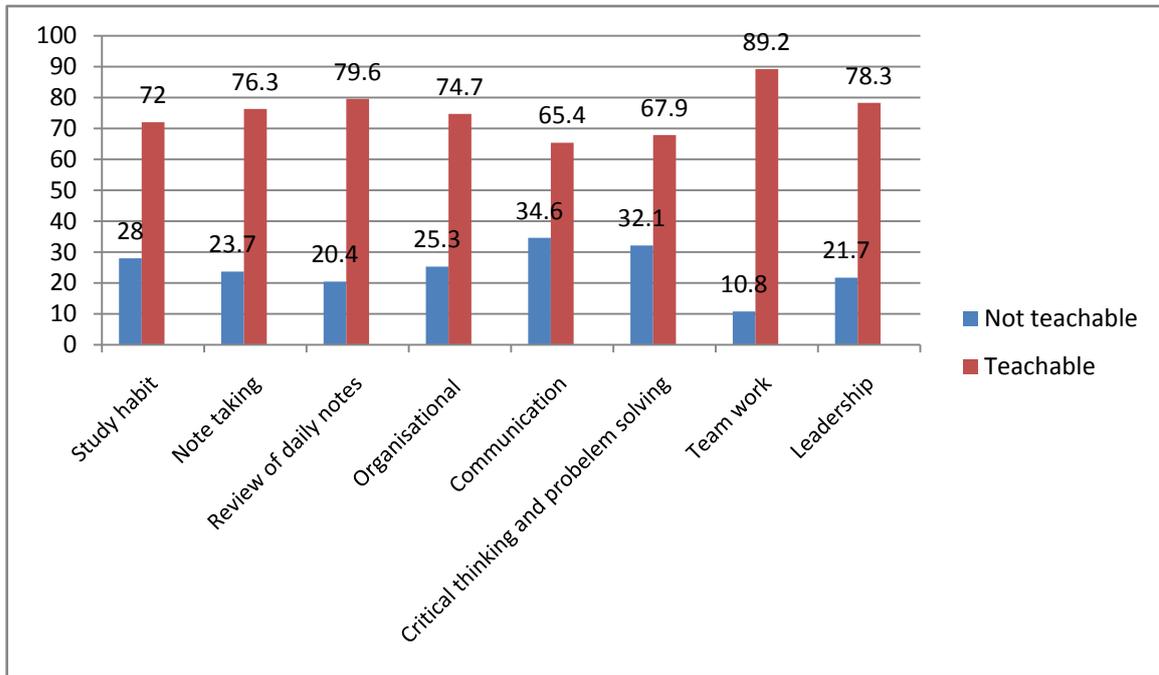


Figure 1. Perception of teachers on teachability of soft skills

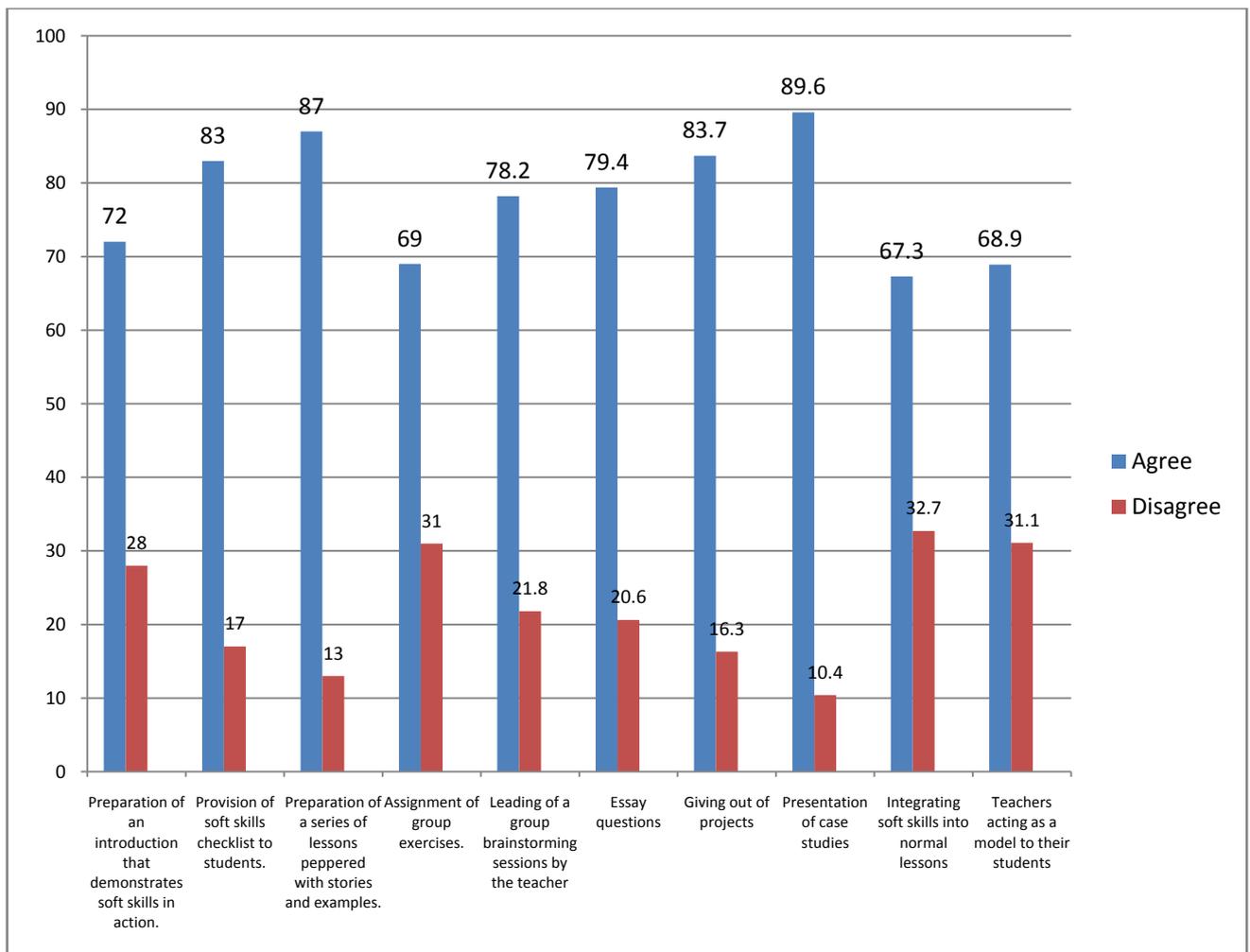


Figure 2. Perception of teachers on ways of teaching soft skills

Figure 2 reveals that 67.3 to 89.6% of the sampled teachers agreed with the stated ways of teaching while those who disagreed with the outlined ways ranged from 10.4% to 32.7% of the participating teachers in the study. It, therefore, follows that majority of the teachers agreed that all the ways of teaching of soft skills as depicted in figure 2 can be used to teach soft skills. This finding is in consonance with the finding of Thacker and Yost (2002) that students need to be trained to become effective team members as employers often find that graduates lack good relational skills, perhaps, because the casual and/or occasional manner in which these skills were being taught. This finding also corroborates the finding of Dewson, Eccles, Tackey and Jackson as reported by Kechagias (2011), that there are several and varied methods of teaching and assessing soft skills. In other words no particular system of teaching and assessing soft skills is sacrosanct for all soft skills. What may work well for a particular skill may not work at all in the case of another skill. Critical stakeholders in education such as students and teachers to strike a balance on the ways soft skills should be taught so that learners who are sure to become employees tomorrow would have acquired the necessary soft skills needed in the world of work or at the workplace.

In figure 3, 61.4% to 83.3% of the participating teachers in the study aver that soft skills can be assessed as it is also possible to teach as they earlier pointed out above. However, 22% to 38.5% of these teachers argued that the skills are not amenable to assessment. Thus, result here shows that majority of the teachers agreed that the soft skills as displayed in figure 3 can be assessed. The implication of this is that teachers are of opinion that soft skills can be assessed in the secondary school setting. The finding supports the conclusion of Aricia (2013) who observed that there is need to appropriately measure and assess performance of students in relation to soft skills. It also agrees with the finding of Dewson, Eccles, Tackey, and Jackson (2000) that there are different ways of assessing soft skills and that the method used in one situation may differ from the one used in another.

In essence, what is assessed in one skill will be different from what is assessed in the other. It is when the skills are assessed that it can be ascertained that the skills have been acquired in readiness for application in the workplace and in the larger society.

Hypotheses 1, 2 & 3:

From the table, the t-value (4.773) for teachability is significant at 0.05 because $p < 0.05$. It follows that there is significant difference in the perception of male and female teachers on teaching of soft skills. The mean values of 142.80 for male teachers and 119.40 for female teachers indicate that male teachers perceived the feasibility of teaching soft skills better than their female counterparts. Also, the t-value (4.702) for the assessment of soft skills, is significant at 0.05, ($p < 0.05$). This shows that there is significant difference in the perception of male and female teachers on the assessment of soft skills at the secondary school level in Ogun State. The mean values of 139.80 for male teachers and 116.38 for female teachers indicate that male teachers perceived the feasibility of assessing soft skills better than their female counterparts. Furthermore, the t-value (0.904) on the difference between male and female teachers' perceptions on ways of teaching soft skills, is not significant at 0.05, ($p > 0.05$). This shows that there is no difference of significant magnitude in the perception of male and female teachers on the ways of teaching soft skills in schools. The mean values of 35.48 for male teachers and 34.69 for female teachers indicate that male teachers agreed more with the outlined ways of teaching soft skills better than female teachers did. The insignificant difference in perception is not surprising as it is expected of both male and female teachers to comprehend ways of teaching since both possess teaching qualification and experience. This result agrees with the finding of Li-Tze Lee and Tien-Tse Lee (2011) who found that Male and female do not possess different opinions regarding soft skills required in elementary schools.

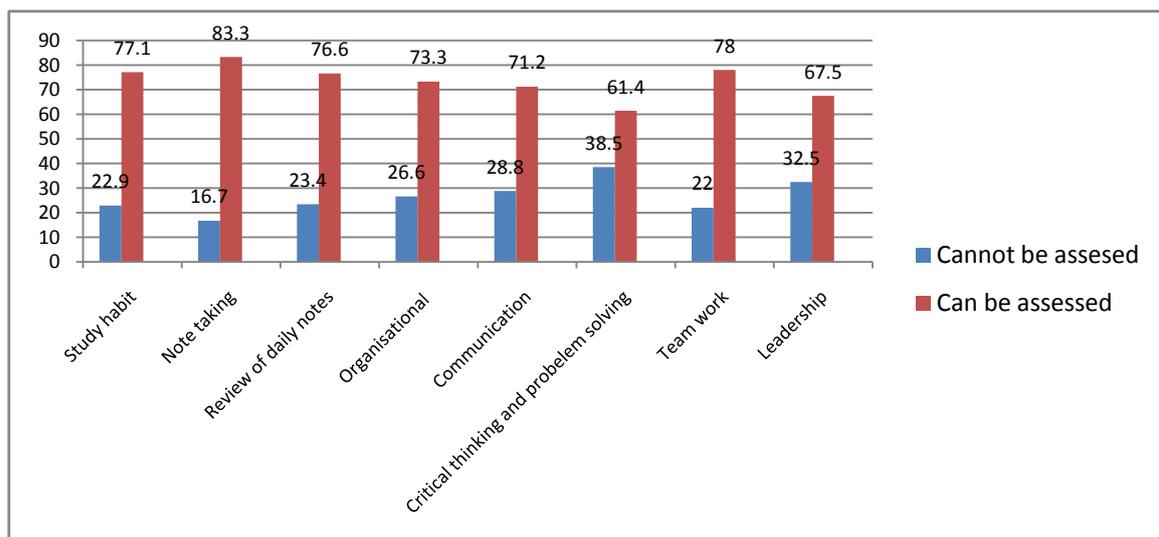


Figure 3. Perception of teachers on assessment of soft skills

Table 1. Differences between male and female teachers' perceptions on the teachability of, assessing and ways of teaching soft skills

Difference in the perceptions of male and female teachers on teaching of soft skills						
Gender	N	Mean	Sd	df	T	sig
Male	60	142.80	14.367	78.176	4.773	0.00
Female	60	119.40	35.152			
Difference in the perceptions of male and female teachers on assessing of soft skills						
Male	60	139.80	14.367	78.164	4.702	0.00
Female	60	116.38	35.143			
Difference in the perceptions of male and female teachers on the ways of teaching soft skills						
Male	60	35.48	4.307	101.508	0.904	0.37
Female	60	34.69	2.809			

4. Conclusions

Teaching and assessing soft skills are not common phenomena in Nigerian schools, yet the importance of the acquisition of soft skills to being employable cannot be over overlooked. This study investigated the teachability and assessment of soft skills as well the ways by which they can be taught and concluded that they are both teachable and can be assessed, and also taught in variety of ways. It also established that while male and female teachers perceived that soft skills are teachable and can be assessed, the teaching and assessment of these skills are yet to be properly incorporated to the teaching and learning process in our clime. While both male and female teachers do not significantly differ in their perception of ways of teaching soft skills, they significantly differ in their perception of the teaching and assessing soft skills.

5. Recommendations

Consequent upon the findings and conclusion in the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. All stakeholders should together formulate implementable policy to engender the effective teaching and assessment of soft skills in secondary schools.
2. Training of Teachers on how to teach and assess soft skills at all levels of education should be a deliberate national education policy that should be rigorously implemented.
3. Awareness campaign should be deliberately mounted to sensitise both students and teachers on the importance of soft skills and therefore improve their degree of interest in teaching, learning and acquiring soft skills.

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