Proposed Mechanisms for Developing Soft Skills to Improve Faculty Performance at the Faculty of Education, Fayoum University

(A Case Study)

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Abstract

In the face of rapid changes in higher education, the need for faculty members who can keep up with evolving knowledge and its applications has become more critical. Soft skills, which are often neglected as marginal in the traditional education system that focuses on technical skills, play a vital role in the performance and effectiveness of university faculty. These skills directly and indirectly affect the quality of teaching, research productivity, and the overall academic environment. Key soft skills include communication, leadership, teamwork, adaptability, and empathy.

In light of the Unified Teacher Preparation Program guidelines in Egyptian Teacher Education Colleges (2023), and the requirements of curricula in schools under the Ministry of Education, which emphasize practical teaching methods to prepare teachers for multidisciplinary curricula, the idea for this research emerged. The focus is on enhancing teachers' planning and teaching abilities, and scientifically evaluating their work, all of which require the development of soft skills.

Previous studies on faculty performance at Fayoum University, including those in the Faculty of Education, identified gaps in faculty development programs. These programs do not fully meet faculty members' needs, often lack modern trends in academic performance development, and are insufficient in addressing the large teaching load and the optimal use of information and communication technology to improve teaching, research, and community engagement.

Moreover, the 2022-2027 strategic plan's environmental analysis highlighted the underutilization of faculty performance evaluations in development and improvement efforts, leading to suboptimal performance in some cases. This highlights the need for faculty members to possess a certain level of soft skills to efficiently carry out their duties.

Objectives of the Research:

The research aims to:

- Identify the theoretical foundations of soft skills and their role in improving faculty performance at Egyptian universities, based on contemporary educational literature.
- Investigate the current state of soft skills development among faculty members at the Faculty of Education, Fayoum University.
- Examine the availability of soft skills among faculty members at the Faculty of Education, Fayoum University, from the perspective of students.
- Propose mechanisms to develop soft skills and improve faculty performance at the Faculty of Education, Fayoum University.

The research uses a descriptive approach to describe the theoretical framework and study procedures, employing a case study method.

The study is structured into five sections:

1. The general framework of the research
2. Theoretical framework, which includes:
   - Theoretical foundations of soft skills for faculty members in Egyptian universities, as discussed in contemporary educational literature, including the concept and types of soft skills that align with 21st-century skills.
   - Theoretical foundations for developing faculty performance in universities, based on current educational literature.

The research also covers the reality of soft skills development at the Faculty of Education, Fayoum University, focusing on the following:

1. Roles and responsibilities of faculty members in Egyptian universities.
2. The relationship between soft skills and faculty performance in teacher education colleges.
3. The development of soft skills among faculty members at the Faculty of Education, Fayoum University, from a documentary perspective.

A field study was conducted to measure the availability of soft skills among faculty members at the Faculty of Education, Fayoum University, from the students' perspective. The study includes:

- Objectives of the field study
- Study community, sample, tools, procedures, statistical methods, and findings.

The study sample included general education students from the four academic levels at the Faculty of Education, Fayoum University, totaling 1,582 students, with a sample of 310 students (19.60% of the total population). A questionnaire was used to gather data from the sample, and personal interviews were conducted with 22 faculty members (18.2% of the total faculty) to explore the practice of soft skills among faculty members at the Faculty of Education.

The results from the theoretical framework and both documentary and field studies identified key soft skills necessary for faculty members at the Faculty of Education, Fayoum University. These skills align with 21st-century competencies in areas like critical thinking, creativity, digital culture, and professional and life skills. Based on the findings, a set of proposed mechanisms was developed to enhance the soft skills of faculty members at the Faculty of Education, Fayoum University.