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**The Need of the Hour – A Study of Post Pandemic Gen Z and Soft Skills Gap :  
Five Underrated AEIOU Soft Skills and 3Cs Solution.**

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**Dr. Nayna Rangwala**Assistant Professor, Communication Skills and ISEP Cell, Kadi Sarva  
Vishwavidyalaya, Gandhinagar, Gujarat.

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**Article Received:** 07/03/2025**Article Accepted:** 09/04/2025**Published Online:** 10/04/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.04.351

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**Abstract:**

It is a bitter reality that soft skills are the foundations for a person's success yet they are not properly weighed in educational curriculum. Generation born in late 1990s and early 2000s is categorized as the Generation Z or Gen Z. The paper particularly presents the skill analysis and skill gap of post pandemic Generation Zers. Alike previous generations, this generational group is also affected by the social, political and economic contemporary surroundings. Along with other circumstances, Covid-19 has played very crucial role in shaping the psyche and personality of this Gen Z group. Various studies have found that a large number of skills are missing in targeted Gen Z groups. Among them, the paper tries to focus on five soft skills beginning with AEIOU namely Adaptability, Emotional Intelligence, Interpersonal Skills, Organizational Skills and Understanding. Moreover, the paper also focuses on the importance of these skills and the reasons for their gap. Lastly, it displays possible solution by the 3Cs model -working with the principles of Collaboration, Change and Commitment among four interconnected agencies i.e., policy makers, educationalist, job providers and job aspirants.

**Key Words:** Soft skills, Skill analysis, skill gap, Gen Z, Pandemic, AEIOU skills, 3Cs solution.

**Introduction:**

“The more we give importance to skill development, the more competent will be our youth.”  
- Shree Narendra Modi

Indian Prime Minister Shree Narendra Modi in the virtual speech of IIT convocation advocates the need of the hour stating “the skilling, re-skilling and upskilling” (Pti, 2022). It is beyond the shadow of a doubt that skill enhancement is the need of the time yet a serious concern for the same is missing somehow. The hard skills and soft skills both are play a crucial role in one's success. Hard skills are considered as technical skills needed for job competencies, desirable for entering in any specific job type. Soft skills are life skills works as catalyst in every field. The soft skills can be categorized as “cognitive, social and emotional skills in order to better face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Cimatti, 2016). As

the cognitive skills encompass “various mental abilities, including memory, attention, language, visual-spatial awareness, and executive functions” (HappyNeuron, 2024). While social skills are the skills one needed for communication and interaction. Emotional skills denote “the ability to recognize, express and regulate your emotions” (Emotional Skills - FSHS, 2024).

In recent times, the skill anticipation, skill acquisition, skill teaching and practical application are the most considerable areas to be explored. Studying soft skills in the context of the newest generation entering the workforce, Gen Z, would be both challenging and insightful. It is indicated by the *World Economic Forum* “By 2025, Gen Z will account for one-third of the workforce” (Cohen, 2023). More specifically, this paper emphasizes on Generation Z (Gen Z) and examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their acquisition of soft skills. The term Gen Z signifies, “a way of referring to the group of people who were born in the late 1990s and early 2000s” (“Generation Z,” 2025). There is a little discord regarding the time line of Gen Z among the scholars. Broadly Gen Z considered for the group born between end-1990s and early 2010s. The Generation Z is also known as zoomers, iGeneration, Digital Natives, and the true generation. The Z in the name refers to Zoomer which means the folks who are more familiar to zoom. This is the first “digital native” generation who mostly has known the world through internet. It would be desired to know two more terms “millennial or Cohort Y born between 1980 to 1994” (The Generations Which Generation Are You by Nwe Yin Mon - Issuu, 2018)) as their predecessors and Gen Alpha as their successors.

A generational timeline is a valuable and commonly used tool for understanding the characteristics of specific generational cohorts. It is also important to recognize that various technological, economic, and social shifts across the world have influenced the development of certain generational cohorts. In this context, Pandemic – Covid19 has played very inescapable part in shaping the personalities of the Gen Z. This generation is currently in their teenage years or recently transitioned into adulthood. This generation possess “significant challenges alternating their behaviour and communication styles after being stuck in a virtual environment for over two years” (Marketing team Neufvillelaw, n.d.). Their increased inclination towards the digital world during pandemic which is clearly reflected in their life choices and aspirations.

### **Some notable effects of pandemic on Gen Zers:**

- Remote learning, as a replacement for the traditional school environment, has created barriers to the development of many social skills
- Restriction on social gathering during pandemic has also hindered their social as well emotional skills. As a result, many members of the Gen Zers have experienced depression, isolation and anxiety.
- They are more inclined to digital world and social media and missed in-Person environment.
- Many employment sectors were impacted by COVID-19, leading to recession and job uncertainty, which have affected individuals either directly or indirectly.

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- Various changed scenario at social, political, educational, financial level have affected their perspective and decision making.
  - Currently, the Gen Z is entering in real work experiences and certain challenges are being faced by them and their employers, especially related to soft skills. The paper examines the hurdles encountered by Generation Z in the post-pandemic era within traditional work settings, stemming from a lack of specific soft skills. Additionally, it delves into concerned recommendations.

**Objectives:**

1. Try to get an overview of the importance of soft skills.
2. To consider generational timeline of Gen Z as a tool for analysis.
3. To examine the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on Gen Zers.
4. To understand the concept of five very crucial yet underrated skills beginning with AEIOU.
5. To suggest 3Cs model to conquer the soft skills gap in Gen Zers.

**Literature Review:**

The article by Barbara Cimatti, “Definition, Development, Assessment of Soft Skills and Their Role for The Quality of Organizations and Enterprises” (Cimatti, 2016) provides an account of primary discussion about the discourse of soft skills. Using the term ‘transversal competencies’ for soft skills, the article portrays various categories like, “social aptitudes, language and communication capability, friendliness and ability of working in team” (Cimatti, 2016). On the bases of these categories eight various skills are listed. The article portrays InTRA personal and InTER personal competence responsible for person’s behaviour. The article is an insightful depiction of the concept of soft skills including different notions given by various scholars.

The research article by Bhavika Mehta “Gen Z In India and Its Characteristics” (Mehta, 2021) is an informative research article, especially focusing upon the Gen Z of India. It also explains the idea of Generation X (born between 1965-1980), Generation Y (born between 1981- 1995). Additionally, it also showcases how Gen Zers of India are different than other developed countries in terms of personal and professional lives. The research paper shows the comparative study of Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z in terms of education, finance, mental health, relationship, jobs etc. Almost all these fields are affected by internet and technology. Still a large part of India living in the remote areas or deprived of facilities can’t be included in this change.

**Research Gap:**

Several studies grounded in similar concepts have explored Generation Z, particularly in relation to their connections with Generation X and Generation Y. Even few of the studies have focused upon the notion of soft skill and its gap in general. But the interconnection between Gen Z and skill gap is least explored research area. This paper tries to connect these two different areas and present the possible result by focusing on a particular

background of pandemic. It is also to note that the previous studies and findings based on soft skills largely covers the skill areas like communication skills, time management, stress management and leadership skills. The present research paper is more concerned about specific five skills mostly connected with emotional side of a person that are least discussed.

### **Discussion:**

Gen Z is a generation more interested in acquiring AI skills rather than traditional soft skills. They tend more towards professional growth rather than personal emotional growth. It is known scenario that the common soft skills like communication skills, team-building, leadership skills, time management, stress management etc. are considered and taught in educational paradigm. However, certain essential skills that are deeply attached to the emotional aspect of a person remain challenging to attain. This research paper aims to highlight five such underrated skills, represented by the acronym AEIOU:

**A – Adaptability,**

**E – Emotional Intelligence**

**I – Interpersonal Skills**

**O – Organizational Skills**

**U - Understanding**

#### **Adaptability:**

Adaptability is a kind of attitude and aptitude one shows towards changing situations. It incorporates many other soft skills within it. One has to adapt oneself with so many changes within the sphere of personal and professional set up. Gen Z is the generation that is supposed to work among many transitional circumstances like working with generation millennial and Generation X, almost with two different mindsets. The previous generations were less engaged with technology, whereas Generation Z stands out with a distinctly stronger inclination toward it. Adaptability in social setting is also a matter of concern for Gen Z. Generation Z might be facing a problem in adjustment of work style and work culture. Moreover, in the age of globalization Gen Z mostly working in hybrid work pattern of online and offline mode, digital as well pen-paper mode, changing team and locale. Apart from professional set up one has to accept the job of remote places for better prospects. In this situation the social, cultural, professional adaptability is very apparent. Job insecurity is also one of the major problems to deal with. On the whole, Gen Z has to be thought to adapt and accept change. At the same time, the post pandemic Gen Zers have spent almost crucial years of learning in isolation so adaptability is one of the difficult skills for them to be acquainted.

#### **Emotional Intelligence:**

“Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to identify and manage one’s own emotions, as well as the emotions of others” (Emotional Intelligence, 2025). In today’s cut throat competition one has to be well equipped to face all sorts of challenges and disorders. It is to be noted that Gen Z has been victimized to great recession of 2008 as well Covid-19 pandemic directly or indirectly. During recessions they might have seen their previous age group employees to strive for the employment. Pandemic has created emotional void for many of us and the Gen Z is the top-most victim of it. Pandemic has restricted their mobility and social connection nearly for 3 years, during this time the generation was at an age to

learn and adapt social attachments and interactions. It is bitter truth that the gap of these years has affected their emotional quotients. The Gen Z is more tend towards heavy use of gaming, less reading of books, and newspapers.

### **Interpersonal Skills:**

Interpersonal skills suggest the basic skills needed to communicate, interact and work with others in career as well personal domains. Generation Z navigates interpersonal skills within an entirely different context compared to previous generations. The generation Z has missed the chances of making new friends, getting mentorship, professional internships during their crucial years of growth due to pandemic. There are many blames against Generation Z like they don't know greeting styles in formal and informal surroundings, or they don't know how to draft the email or no language proficiency etc. At the same time, it should be considered that Generation Z is the generation brought up and acquainted with the slangs, emojis, social media around them. Consciously or unconsciously these factors have shaped their psyche and personality. In this condition, demanding traditional ways of communication, interpersonal relations are altogether extreme. One has to understand the changed mentality of the generation Z regarding interpersonal skills, "Sixty-four percent of Gen Z workers say they worry about annoying their coworkers by asking too many questions...Gen Z is also more likely to say they struggle to communicate more in writing than verbally." (Castro, 2023) They are more introverts and love their independence which also hinders them to mingle with others.

### **Organizational Skills:**

Organization refers to the set of the skills which help to develop the system of work, complete the work efficiently and deliver expected result on time. They are cluster of many skills sets like time management, multitasking, setting goal, setting deadlines, organization of personal belongings and documents, planning etc. Traditional work environments heavily emphasize organizational skills to ensure timely outcomes. However, Gen Z employees often approach task organization with a different mindset. Their strong reliance on digital platforms may make physical organization more challenging. While digitalization and virtual tools offer convenience, they also come with limitations—such as the risk of document corruption or system failures.

### **Understanding**

Employers expect understanding of the business, about the company and work culture from the employee. As the world has turned global village, working with the people of different nation, culture, mindset is a very common scenario. Understanding others, showing empathy towards them is also the part of job profile. The Gen Z has to be get prepared with all these qualities to be successful in career and personal growth. Understanding of what to grab and what not to, understanding of being judicious and wise. Developing conscience along with intellect is also equally important.

### **No blame, let's frame:**

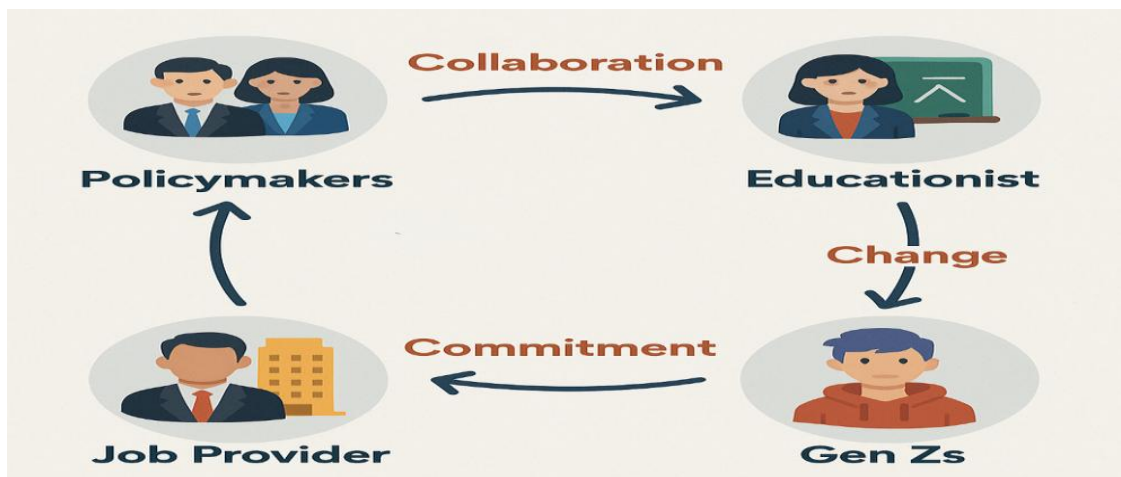
The contemporary scenario is full of blames and dissatisfactions concerning Gen Zers as a work force today. The solution does not lie in blaming them but it is there in the

approach of promoting, utilizing their potentials and welcoming their strength. It requires a notable change in the mindset of leaders, policy makers and educators. It is a duty of previous age group to bridge the gap by support and guidance instead of blaming them. McDonald's USA chief people officer Melissa Kersey well illustrates the situation and directs saying, "we should re-examine which skills matter most, especially for the next generation entering the workforce. We should lay that foundation for employees to build the soft skills they need that will serve them throughout their career" (Corporation, 2018).

### 3Cs Solution:

In the direction of framing something concrete, the 3Cs model can be helpful.

1. Collaboration
2. Change in approach
3. Commitment



### Collaboration:

- To get positive outcome in the direction of skill gap, collaboration is required at many levels.
- Systematic skill anticipation is the first step to achieve the desired result in Gen Z soft skill development.
- Decentralization and scattered experiences are leading to the blame game rather than any productive outcomes.
- Policy makers, job market, educationalist and target learners should be brought under one umbrella and thought in the direction of filling the skill gap.

### Change:

- In the same context, it seems that the grass root changes are needed. Firstly, there should be changes in the basic understanding of the skills. Undoubtedly, the efforts are being made

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in the skill enhancement but they are more about hard skills rather than soft skills.

➤ Additionally, job providers also highlight hard skills in classified and hardly any reference of soft skills is mentioned.

➤ On the basis of the study of more than 100 advertisements on online employment portal, it is observed that majority of the job seekers are illustrating hard skills in the advertisement, there is no mention of soft skills in it.

➤ Few examples of job advertisements:

- “Kukarwada Nagrik Sahakari Bank Ltd., a leading cooperative bank with ₹800+ Crores business volume, invites applications for the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) position. This prestigious role requires an experienced banking professional who meets RBI’s “fit and proper” criteria. Applications must be submitted within 10 days (by 15 April 2025)” (Admin, 2025).

- “Dharmasinh Desai University (DDU), a NAAC A-Grade accredited institution in Nadiad, Gujarat, invites applications for the position of Assistant Professor (Computer Engineering) under Self-Finance category. Eligible candidates must apply online through the university portal before 21 April 2025, 4:00 PM” (Admin, 2025b).

➤ These advertisements are mostly showcasing the hard skills needed for the job and lacking the mention of the soft skills. The inclusion of soft skills in classified can motivate the aspirants towards acquainting the soft skills.

➤ Change in the perception is badly needed. It can foster the growth of soft skills. The students from the very early age should be encouraged to cultivate these soft skills.

➤ Soft Skills should be part of curriculum as well they also should be evaluated and considered in academic evaluation. Moreover, clear indication of soft skills can help policy makers as well educators to inculcate these soft skills in the curriculum.

### **Commitment:**

➤ It is rightly said, “where there is a will, there is a way”. Commitment is a great driving force to any work.

➤ Commitment should be from the side of all the four stakeholders i.e., policy makers, educationalist, job providers and Gen Z job aspirants.

➤ The policy makers should develop effective skill anticipation survey and advance accordingly in various policy making.

➤ The curriculum also should be designed keeping the need of the time.

➤ The role of educationalist is also very crucial. It may happen that many soft skill teachers are not actually trained for the same curriculum.

➤ Do the graduates, post graduates or even doctorates with the discipline of English literature and language fit for teaching soft skills? The answer may be big No. The teacher should also get proper training for teaching soft skills. Job providers also can move further with a long-term vision and initiate for certain positive steps.

➤ Time being monitory investments and teaming up of Gen Z with previous generation can also be fruitful.

➤ Last but not the least, the actual target job aspirants – Gen Z has to work with the

abundance of commitment, sincerity and hard work. Gen Z is a smart generation by many means so their commitment can lead them to long miles.

### **Conclusion:**

Soft skills play a crucial role in both personal and professional development, regardless of age or location. Every generation possesses its own distinct characteristics, yet certain fundamental skills remain universally essential. Approaching the problem by delving into its root causes from multiple dimensions, coupled with acceptance and collaborative effort, can yield effective results. Gen Zers are not an Anti-social in nature rather they are selectively social. By using their technical knowledge, determination, maturity, health consciousness, clarity the bridge can be built between previous employers and Gen Z.

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**Citation:**

**Dr. Nayna Rangwala** "The Need of the Hour – A Study of Post Pandemic Gen Z and Soft Skills Gap : Five Underrated AEIOU Soft Skills and 3Cs Solution." *International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2025, pp. 344-351. DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.04.351.