Strengthening Soft Skills in Online Learning

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Abstract. Soft skills are needed to prepare students for the world of work. Thus, this research contributes as a reference in developing students' soft skills during this pandemic, which requires learning to be done virtually. By providing special training to students to improve their soft skills during this pandemic, the world of education will create graduates who still have soft skills that are competent and meet the needs of the industrial world. This study applied an experimental design to determine the influence of holding special training for students regarding soft skills abilities. This study revealed a very good result where the soft skills ability samples have increased after attending the training that was designed. The pre-test results showed an average value of 1.95 at a rate of 5. After participating in training, a post-test assessment was carried out, getting an average value of 4.49. The samples used in this research were students willing to participate in the training without any coercion from any party. This research provides strength in soft skill competencies for students in a pandemic situation to maintain the quality of graduates.

Keywords: Soft skills, online learning, and pandemic.

1 Introduction

Education is one of the facilities expected to produce qualified human resources in accordance with their needs. Quality education will determine quality graduates as well. Quality education includes the existence of a learning process under the needs of students. Learning is influenced by the situation and conditions of a country that can affect learning applied to the world of education. Currently, the world is facing a sudden change that requires fast learning. Learning that was initially being done face-to-face is entirely done online due to the widespread transmission of the COVID-19 virus throughout the world. It has initiated changes and disruptions in the academic field, and a rapid movement is needed to innovate [1]. It requires extra adjustments for students and educators to keep producing graduates following what is expected. It can be seen that today's students are accustomed to existing technological developments in accordance with learning that previously always led to the industrial revolution 4.0, which familiarizes or introduces students to technological developments [2] but requires habits in using technology for learning [3].

Apart from the rapid development and improvement of technology as well as the habits of technology users, there are still many skills that must be considered and trained in the learning

process, whether online or face-to-face. Along with students' psychomotor and cognitive skills, which must be fulfilled in online learning, affective abilities must also be addressed to promote students' competency. Affective skills in this learning are more widespread with the need for soft skills. Soft skills are no less important than hard skills in preparing students to enter the world of work when they graduate [4]. Many industries need or choose a worker with good soft skills compared to other abilities because many of the current weaknesses in human resources are in soft skills. Meanwhile, soft skills are skills that are needed by the industrial world to be able to help develop companies well and significantly. The industrial world currently prioritizes soft skills rather than psychomotor skills to choose a worker. Many industries think that someone who has good psychomotor skills or cognitive skills but is low in soft skills will not necessarily be a successful worker and can develop an industry. However, workers with brilliant soft skills will rapidly develop an industry with good soft skills. With good soft skills, a person will control himself and develop himself and adapt himself to be even better.

Seeing the importance of the need for soft skills and the problems being faced, namely the case of the COVID-19 virus outbreak, special attention is needed to develop these soft skills in students. Creating graduates who have good soft skills competence requires a good learning process. Based on this, the role of stakeholders is needed to develop compatibility of online learning with the expected needs [5]. Learning itself has an important meaning in realizing the goals of education. Creating good learning requires the readiness of an educator to produce learning that is in accordance with the needs of students and requires the readiness of students to be able to follow the lessons that have been prepared. A teacher must establish a pleasant environment for students in the classroom for the learning to be enjoyable and for the learning to be effectively communicated. The learning that has been done at this time is directly or face-to-face in the room, but with the current pandemic situation, the learning process has to be done virtually. This rapid change in the learning process certainly has obstacles faced both from the students' side and the educators or teachers/lecturers.

There are so many obstacles that must be faced in this online learning process. On the other hand, the achievement of educational goals must still be prioritized to produce graduates who have good competencies. This is one of the most difficult issues an educator may face in such a difficult economic climate. Therefore, it requires a skilled and creative teacher to create fun and not boring learning for students so that they are able to achieve the expected educator goals. Creative teachers/lecturers are able to be creative to create fun learning and successfully explore the potential of students. The direct or face-to-face learning process to explore or train the soft skills potential of students sometimes still has difficulty maximizing the achievement of students' soft skills. At the same time, the current situation requires learning to be done virtually, which may hinder students' soft skills development. Based on this, a teacher/lecturer has difficulty controlling students directly but only sees the results of the achievement of the material absorbed by students. Meanwhile, in assessing or controlling soft skills, direct assessment is needed, among others, to see students' socialization.

Based on these issues, it is necessary to provide students with learning specifically designed to assist them in developing soft skills. It can be a training that focuses on training the soft skills of students for several periods and preparing several handbooks for students so that teachers/lecturers can see the development of soft skills values in students in a focused manner. Thus the world of education can still prepare graduates needed by the industrial world who

choose to employ human resources who have good soft skills compared to psychomotor abilities.

2 Literature review

2.1 Online learning

Learning is one element in the process of achieving educational goals. Learning can be done by using and developing various techniques in the learning process where the expected result can have a significant impact on students' success. The learning process activity aims to transfer knowledge and skills as well as train attitude development done by educators to students. Educators can develop learning models according to their needs and follow existing situations and conditions. Seeing the current conditions with the ongoing Pandemic outbreak, the safest learning to do is learning done in a virtual way. Virtual learning is an alternative to reduce the chain of transmission of the Covid-19 virus that is currently happening. Almost all schools in the world make changes from face-to-face learning to online learning. This change is indeed implemented immediately and accepted by all parties to continue running and maintaining the quality of students.

Online learning that has been done provides a challenge for students to remain disciplined and focused on carrying out learning well even without face-to-face meetings by the teacher in the classroom [6]. Online learning can help students be more innovative and flexible because the teaching and learning process is more student-centered, requiring students' independence and awareness [7]. In applying online learning, attention must be paid to understanding the basic concepts or understanding, defining, and clearly articulating concepts related to the field so that online learning can be implemented appropriately with maximum results [8]. A lot must be prepared to implement online learning, including learning media, communication tools, teachers' skills in using communication tools, and students and parents/guardians [9]. Fully online learning has drawbacks for students, such as students experiencing a lack of direct interaction with friends in class and a lack of socialization with each other [10]. It is quite the contrary with Direct learning, which can develop and provide opportunities for students to interact.

2.1 Soft skill needs for students

Soft skills are very much needed for students because they are prepared for entering the world of work. The learning that has been doing currently does not only focus on the achievement of hard skills, but the achievement of the soft skills of students at this time is also a special concern, this is a challenge for the world of education which will prepare human resources in accordance with the needs of the industrial world [11]. The ability of hard skills and soft skills must go hand in hand to support one's success [12] both in the industrial world and in the entrepreneurial world [13], and to facilitate the individual in getting a good position in a work profession [14]. Currently, soft skills are so important in the eyes of the industry because most of the industrial world believes that human resources who have good soft skills will be easier to help advance the company than human resources who only have hard skills [15]. Along with the industrial world, recognizing this creates a challenge for the world of education to generate graduates who are in line with industry expectations so that graduates can be put to use and put in their best

efforts. Seeing the current conditions with the world being hit by the Covid-19 virus requires learning to be done online, so there is no direct interaction. Meanwhile, direct interaction in the learning process will help students train their soft skills and can be directly assessed by teachers. Teachers can directly evaluate for improvement if there are deficiencies in the classroom. These activities can be fulfilled simultaneously with learning any material in face-to-face learning.

Soft skills assessment can be done simultaneously with other materials if learning is done face-to-face. However, it may be a little difficult for educators to assess students' soft skills with the current online learning model. To improve the soft skills of students in online learning, a focused treatment is needed to keep producing graduates who have good soft skills and are in accordance with industry needs. The treatment needed is in the form of soft skills training for students to train and develop their soft skills.

3 Research method

This study applied an experimental method. The experimental research design used was one group pretest-posttest. The design used was to measure students' soft skills in the online learning process during the current pandemic. This study was aimed to provide treatment through soft skills training given specifically to students and then a test was done after the treatment was. This research design provided a pre-test before the treatment regarding the inculcation of soft skills in online learning. There was a post-test directly after the treatment has been given.

The following is a quasi-experimental one group pretest-posttest research design. This design can be seen in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Research design.

Pre-test	Experiment	Post-test
T1	X	T2

The sample used in this study were students who registered themselves on their own accord without coercion, by registering themselves on a form that the researcher had distributed. The students who were the sample thought that they needed good soft skills and felt that they were not equipped enough to support their career development after graduating from college.

The pre-test was done by giving the instrument provided to the sample to be able to fill it according to the actual situation without any coercion or demands. After the pre-test was implemented, the treatment has to be realized to instill soft skills in students by holding full-time training 3 times with various media and techniques as well as expert resource persons in the field of soft skills.

After the treatment was completed by holding special training for inculcating students' soft skills as preparation for the world of work, a post-test was required to measure the improvement obtained from the implementation of activities designed to instill the soft skills of students during this pandemic. Soft skills are the talk of many circles, the soft skills abilities include socialization, talent, language, communication, problem solving, and good teamwork [16].

4 Research and discussion

Soft skills are important things that can be instilled in early learners. Soft skills are one of the capitals needed to become reliable and highly dedicated Human Resources (HR). Previously, soft skills were considered less important than hard skills, so students were always required to compete to get good grades for hard skills/psychomotor abilities, while soft skills were forgotten because they assumed that hard skills were needed to get the desired result job. This view is no longer applicable because the business world and the industrial world currently have a view which states that prospective workers who have good soft skills will be the target of many job seekers/employees. The world of education must have begun to understand these conditions because to design education that does not only focus on learning hard skills, but must be balanced by soft skills as a provision for students to get appropriate and decent jobs.

The application of soft skills in education can be applied through the learning process. Activities that students can participate in during the learning process would include suggestions for soft skills development, but due to the current situation and condition of the Covid-19 Virus outbreak, students were required to complete their learning online, which will present a challenge for them and educators to continue to instill soft skills in students. It takes adaptation to get used to online learning both for students and for educators. In this adaptation process for approximately one year, educators are more focused on the material that must be conveyed to students so that the achievement of instilling students' soft skills is forgotten.

Seeing from the students' point of view, they already understand the importance of soft skills needs as their provision to be able to get a job that suits them. This study provided a sample of students who really intended to develop soft skills in themselves and consider soft skills so important. A total of 30 samples were selected to participate in a special program for inculcating students' soft skills and the results had a very good improvement. These results can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Soft skills ability results.

No	Soft Skills Indicator	Pre-test	Post-test
1	Self-development that is carried out for the advancement of students' skills	1,81	4,19
2	Self-development view for students' careers	1,81	4,31
3	Student communication skills	1,81	4,31
4	Point of view the importance of communication skills in students career development	1,88	4,38
5	Students teamwork skills	1,9	4,44
6	The level of excitement at having teamwork	1,88	4,63
7	The level of need for teamwork in students career development	1,88	4,69
8	Students creativity skills	1,81	4,56
9	The level of creativity needed in the career development of students	2	4,63
10	Students ability in critical thinking during problem-solving	1,88	4,44

No	Soft Skills Indicator	Pre-test	Post-test
11	Students self-confidence level	2,06	4,94
12	The level of reading ability as an opportunity to improve students' careers	2,06	4,62
13	Ability to identify potential in students	1,88	4,5
14	Students ability to set future goals	1,88	4,63
15	Students ability in problem solving	1,94	4,63
16	Students ability in student learning strategies	1,75	4,69
	Range	**1,95**	**4,56**

Table above 2 provides information on improving students' soft skills after participating in special soft skills training for students in online learning. The 30 students participated in the training with the soft skills indicators mentioned above in table 2. The assessment was done by means of self-assessment, then the score was obtained with an average value of 1.95 with a range of 5. The samples were tested with the same technique and assessment after participating in the soft skills training in this online learning period. The average score was 4.56 in the vulnerable score of 5.

This soft skills training was programmed separately as an additional meeting for students outside the subject learning process. It was designed to provide training focused on developing students' soft skills to get maximum results. As expected, the soft skills training program obtained very good results, which can be seen from the pre-test and post-test results, which had an increase in the number of 2.61. With this increase, it can be seen that the increase in students' soft skills was extraordinary. This soft skills training paid attention to 16 indicators of soft skills that are very much needed by students to face the world of work after graduation. The experts validated these 16 soft skills indicators based on initial observations made by looking at the current situation and conditions.

This soft skills training was very much needed by students to fortify in continuing their careers later in the business and industrial world. Students are expected to face existing situations and conditions and survive with good soft skills.

5 Conclusion

Soft skills have a very important influence to make quality human resources. Through education and the learning process, soft skills in students can be instilled. Online learning that has been done during the current pandemic still has to instill students' ability or soft skills as a provision to face competition in the world of work. Learning carried out without face-to-face required special attention to cultivating the value of soft skills for students. In other words, a structured schedule can be created to train students' soft skills. Structured scheduling would help the seriousness of students to explore their soft skills. It would make it easier or help students to become responsible individuals. Thus, it would help the process or study period of students be controlled and improve students' study results. In other words, training to grow soft skills in students would provide benefits in the short and long term. The short-term advantage for students was being able to help students complete their studies properly and on time. In addition, the long-term advantage was to make students as human resources who have qualifications

according to the needs of the Business World and the Industrial World so that students would get jobs easily and easily without a long wait. This research could help students develop and achieve soft skills even in the online learning process. Soft skills training was very much needed and had a good influence on helping the soft skills development of students.

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