

THE IMPORTANCE OF BALANCE BETWEEN HARD SKILLS AND SOFT SKILLS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATES

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Abstrak: *Ranah ketenagakerjaan meyakini bahwa sumber daya manusia yang luar biasa adalah individu yang tidak hanya memiliki keterampilan teknis tetapi juga mahir dalam bidang keterampilan interpersonal. Bidang akademisi juga mengungkapkan bahwa, menurut sebuah penelitian yang dilakukan di Universitas Harvard di Amerika Serikat, kesuksesan seseorang tidak semata-mata ditentukan oleh pengetahuan dan kemampuan teknis (hard skill), melainkan oleh kapasitas mereka untuk mengelola diri sendiri dan orang lain secara efektif (soft skill). Kajian ini bertujuan untuk membahas pentingnya menjaga keseimbangan antara hard skill dan soft skill dalam dunia profesional, serta langkah-langkah yang perlu diambil perguruan tinggi untuk mempersiapkan lulusannya secara memadai. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan metodologi fenomenologis. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara terbuka dengan manajer HRD dan mahasiswa. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa masih banyak perguruan tinggi yang belum membekali mahasiswa dengan pengetahuan atau pengakuan akan pentingnya menjaga perpaduan yang harmonis antara kemampuan teknis dan kualitas pribadi untuk memenuhi persyaratan pasar kerja. Siswa harus diberikan sumber daya pendidikan tentang keterampilan intrapersonal dan interpersonal, baik melalui ceramah atau diskusi pasca-magang.*

Kata kunci: hard skill, soft skill, kualitas lulusan perguruan tinggi

Abstract: The realm of employment holds the belief that exceptional human resources are individuals who not only possess technical skills but are also adept in the areas of interpersonal skills. The field of academia has also unveiled that, according to a study conducted at Harvard University in the United States, an individual's success is not solely determined by their knowledge and technical abilities (hard skills), but rather by their capacity to effectively manage themselves and others (soft skills). This study aims to address the significance of maintaining a balance between hard skills and soft skills in the professional world, as well as the necessary steps that tertiary institutions should take in order to adequately prepare their graduates. This is a qualitative study using a phenomenological methodology. Data gathering was conducted through open-ended interviews with HRD managers and students. The findings of the research indicate that there are still numerous higher education institutions that have not equipped students with knowledge or recognition of the significance of maintaining a harmonious blend of technical abilities and personal qualities to meet the requirements of the job market. Students should be provided with educational resources on intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, either through lectures or post-internship discussions.

Keywords: hard skills, soft skills, quality of college graduates

Introduction

Data from the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education in 2018 indicated that the proportion of graduates without jobs in Indonesia had risen to 8.8%, or about 7 million persons (Kemendikbud, 2018). This number keeps rising, and the situation where competition is becoming more fierce with the advent of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era is highly concerning. This presents a problem for Indonesia's manufacturing sector.

Universities and higher education institutions which include vocational, professional and academic programs are institutions that have the responsibility to provide provisions for their students so that national education goals can be achieved. With these duties and responsibilities, tertiary institutions must be able to produce graduates who are competent in various fields so that they can be accepted by private companies, BUMN and government institutions. If the quality of university graduates does not match the needs of the world of work, it will cause unintended consequences or a slowdown in the absorption of university graduates.

Higher education is a place to foster the younger generation of a nation, because they are future leaders who will play the role of leaders and administrators of the country. This is where the intellectuals gather. To be able to produce quality graduates, every tertiary institution must have quality management that is good, efficient, transparent and accountable. There are two approaches commonly used to see the absorption of university graduates, namely the approach from the world of work and the approach from the university community. These two things are still being debated among the wider community.

When viewed from the first approach, namely the world of work, the competencies or expertise of college graduates which are currently considered inadequate or even far from expectations, are the main focus. Competence in the field of expertise that is practiced is what is known as 'hard skills'. Graduates who have just graduated are considered incapable of working in companies, institutions, let alone international agencies that demand high hard skills. In responding to this, the university is actually quite responsive. This is evidenced by the complete facilities and infrastructure on campus such as computer laboratories, languages, or work workshops. But regrettably, not all tertiary institutions are making the best use of their current resources and equipment.

Meanwhile, the alternative method, specifically from educational institutions, places greater emphasis on cultivating the potential of students to develop into individuals who have faith in and revere the Almighty God, possess virtuous characteristics, maintain good health, possess knowledge, exhibit capability, demonstrate creativity, independence, and uphold democratic principles, as well as being responsible citizens (Article 4 of the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 20 of 2003). It is evident that in this alternative approach, students are not only being prepared for employment, but rather a more comprehensive focus is placed on the formation of their character to become well-rounded individuals. This alternative approach highlights what is commonly referred to as 'interpersonal skills'. Both aspects hold equal significance. It can be argued that the proficiency in both hard skills and soft skills is the primary objective and the ultimate goal of education (Darwanto, 2019). However, there are still factions who maintain that hard skills hold greater importance, while others hold the opposite view.

Actors that possess hard skills and soft skills in proportionately equal or balanced amounts are needed in the industrial revolution 4.0 age (Darwanto, 2020). However, many postsecondary institutions continue to place a greater emphasis on students' academic performance, specifically their GPA. According to the findings of a study by Harvard University, a person's success is not solely based on their knowledge and technical skills, which are referred to as hard skills in this context (Widarto, 2011). It can also be determined by their ability to manage their time and the skills of others, which are referred to as soft skills.

According to study by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation, and Stanford study Centre in the United States of America, only 15% of a person's job success can be attributed to hard skills. Instead, 85% of career success is attributed to soft skills. This is supported by a 2009 research by the Indonesian Ministry of National Education, which found that "85% of an individual's academic achievement is determined by Soft Skills. Even Thomas J. Neff and James M. Citrin's 1999 book *Lessons from the Top* asserts that just 10% of a person's success is determined by hard abilities and that 90% of a person's success is driven by soft skills.

According to La France (2016), "personal and interpersonal behaviour that develops and maximises human performance (e.g., confidence, flexibility, honesty, and integrity)" is what is meant by "soft skills," which are defined as "personal and interpersonal behaviour that develops and maximises performance related to self-confidence, flexibility, honesty, and self-integrity." This study intends to provide an answer to the questions of what steps colleges should take to ensure that their graduates are prepared for the workforce and how crucial it is to have a balance between hard and soft skills. In order to generate excellent graduates and experts in educational challenges, higher education should pay more attention to components of the balance between hard skills and soft skills.

Method

This study uses a phenomenological method and is qualitative. According to Trumbull and Watson (in Azmi, Arif, and Wardayani, 2018), qualitative research is a type of study that employs a variety of focuses,

including interpretive, constructive, and subject-specific techniques. According to Yin (in Azmi, Arif, and Wardayani, 2018), qualitative research is a method for learning about the reality of the world and how people interact with things that are relevant to contextual human life.

The approach in this research is phenomenology. According to Littlejohn (in Hasbiansyah, 2008) phenomenology is the study of knowledge based on human consciousness. In phenomenology, one can learn how to understand an event, symptom or object by consciously experiencing it. Creswell (2013) asserts that a phenomenological method is utilised to enhance comprehension or illuminate the significance of an event experienced by an individual or community. Creswell (2013) asserts that the criterion "all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" governs the selection of subjects in qualitative phenomenological research. This means that the individuals chosen as research subjects are those who have knowledge of and experience with the topic under consideration. Studies on phenomena make the assumption that every person experiences a phenomenon fully. In other words, phenomenology studies seek to uncover respondents' most profound understanding of their own experiences during a particular occurrence. The goal of this study is to investigate the experiences of human resources managers from both private businesses and governmental organisations, particularly when they hire recent graduates. Through this phenomenology researchers will get detailed information from managers regarding the problems they encounter when selecting new employees, and dealing with new employees.

Studies of phenomena aim to provide explanations for their causes (Habiansyah, 2008). Essentially, the two primary areas of phenomenological inquiry are as follows: (1). Textural description: the perception of a phenomenon by research participants. An objective element, true information, and things that actually occur are what are felt. (2). The subject's experiences and interpretations are described structurally. There is a subjective component to this description. This element focuses on the perceptions, assessments, emotions, aspirations, and other subjective reactions of research participants in relation to the encounter.

Performing a phenomenological investigation involves the following crucial processes and practises, according to Creswell (2013): (1). Define the subject matter of the proposed study, (2). Make a list of inquiries, (3). data gathering, (4). analysis of data (5). Stage 6 of the essence description. presenting study findings. Purposive sampling was utilised as the sample method in this investigation. Purposive sampling, according to Sugiyono (2018), is a sampling method that takes particular factors into account. As a result, the research sample must satisfy a number of requirements.

Specifically, in-depth interviews or unstructured interviews were the data gathering methods used in this study. Unstructured interviews are unrestricted interviews in which the researcher does not adhere to interview protocols that have been set up systematically and comprehensively for the data collectors. The used interview guide merely provides an overview of the questions that will be asked (Sugiyono, 2018). In this study, researchers spoke with 20 individuals, including 10 human resources (HR) managers, including 5 HR managers from private businesses and 5 HR managers from governmental organisations. This is intended so that researchers obtain data related to the experiences of managers in recruiting fresh graduates and the problems experienced after fresh graduates start working.

In order to obtain objectivity in this study, the researchers triangulated the data by interviewing 10 fresh graduates who had gotten jobs in private companies (5 people), and in government agencies (5 people). Researchers use triangulation to increase their depth and understanding of the phenomenon being investigated by combining several methods and theories. In addition to using triangulation for completeness, enlarge and deepen understanding of the research question (Creswell, 2013). In order to examine the data, the researcher proposed three steps, namely: (1) data reduction (data reduction); (2) data display (data display); and (3) deriving conclusions and verification (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Findings and Discussion

According to the findings of interviews performed by researchers with informants who were HR managers in private businesses and governmental organisations, it was possible to gauge an applicant's aptitude in terms of both hard and soft skills during the interview process. The ability of applicants in hard skills can already be seen both in technical skills, science and technology during the job interview process. During the interview, applicants are also given questions related to their area of expertise and cases that often occur and how to solve the problem. In the same way, soft skills. The following 23 characteristics initiative, etiquette, critical thinking, motivation, spirit, dependability, oral communication, analytical skills, creativity, stress management, self-management, problem solving, quick response, competence, flexibility, team work, independence, active listening, persistent, logical argumentation, commitment, and time management can already be seen during the hiring process, including during Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and presentations. But of course, the whole thing will be clearer after the applicant is accepted and starts carrying

out his work.

The results of interviews with HR managers regarding 23 aspects of soft skills were classified into 2 groups as stated by Ariwibowo (2009) cited in Sailah (2010), namely Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Skills, as can be seen in the following table.

Table 2. Classification of Soft Skills

Groups of Soft Skills	Types
Intrapersonal	Initiative, Creative, Independent, Ethics/ Integrity, Willingness to learn, Critical Thinking, Analytical Skill, Stress Management, Self-Management, Time Management, Problem Solving Skill, Logical Argumentation, Persistent, Competent
Interpersonal	Oral Communication, Quick Response, Flexible, Reliable, Team Work, Motivation, Spirit, Active Listening Commitment

A. Intrapersonal Skills

According to the findings of interviews with HR managers, the majority of the students invited for interviews already understood the hard skills associated with the specialisations they had chosen. They also have GPA above average and when it comes to technology, they are very well informed. But unfortunately, when it comes to soft skills, there are still many graduates who, when invited for a job interview, do not seem to have good intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. "The lack of intrapersonal scholars can be seen when they first arrive at the office. Many of them arrived late, with the excuse that it was difficult to find their office location, or that they had to go through congested routes and other reasons. Because it was too late, they didn't have time to look for a toilet in the office to tidy themselves up. They don't realize that as soon as they arrive at the office, the assessment has already started. The appearance from the feet to the hair shows how the applicant's personality is. This can also show poor time management. This means that they are not properly prepared for the interview which is very important for their future." (AR- HR Manager of a private company).

The poor soft skills of the fresh graduates were also seen when they were asked more specific questions such as about various trending topics and how to solve the problems as well as what concept they would make. "The answers they gave showed that they did not yet have critical thinking skills, they were also unable to analyse a problem in depth, and were unable to find the best solution to solve a problem. Because developing one's character is much harder than learning technical skills, we consider both hard and soft skills when conducting the recruitment process. (RD - HR Director of a privately held corporation). This is consistent with the assertion made by Faizal (2012), who claims that many businesses believe it is preferable to choose potential employees who have exceptional personality and character as opposed to GPA or hard skills. Because developing technical skills is considerably simpler than developing one's character.

B. Interpersonal Skills

In terms of interpersonal skills, there are still many fresh graduates who don't have ones. This can be seen from their appearance when given the opportunity to do Focus Group Discussions (FGD).

"We always give tests in the form of Focus Group Discussions. From this activity, it can be seen how their skills in communicating in public. If when they become students, they are active in organizations, they are usually skilled at communicating. From this FGD it can also be seen whether they can work together in a team, whether they are active listeners and can provide a quick response. From this activity, we can assess whether their student time is classified as active or passive." (SI - HR Manager of Education Office).

"During the interview, you can see how committed they are to their work. Many applicants refuse to be assigned out of town. They even request to be placed in Jakarta. Such people cannot be relied upon. Even though they are fresh graduates who are still young and should prioritize gaining as much experience as possible, not looking for simple jobs with high salary. This is a proof that many fresh graduates today do not have good interpersonal skills." (RE - HR Manager of an NGO).

This is consistent with Shuayto's (2012) assertion that college graduates typically lack the ability to

apply their knowledge to real-world employment settings. This is due to the fact that they lack the soft skills that the organisation requires and which enable them to easily adapt to a work environment.

Researchers in this study also conducted interviews with recent graduates from several colleges to gather information about their understanding of both hard and soft skills as well as their experiences while studying. Of the 10 fresh graduates interviewed, all answered that there were co-curricular activities that students had to participate in, from choirs, sports clubs to adventure activities. Students can choose what activities to follow. However, unfortunately, there has never been any guidance or direction from the campus about what is the purpose of students participating in these activities, in fact, many students who graduate do not understand what hard skills and soft skills mean, and why they are so needed today.

"In my campus there are various co-curricular activities ranging from sports, foreign languages, vocal groups, to nature lovers. I also took part in one of these activities, namely the choir. At that time there was no obligation for every student to take part in ex-school activities. In addition, from the campus there was never any direction regarding the purpose of students having activities outside of class hours, so many students considered these activities to be unimportant and did not need to be attended. If I had known long ago that this had something to do with the soft skills needed for the world of work, I would have followed suit." (UD – fresh graduate of a Private University).

"There was never any instruction given to students about the value of hard skills and soft skills throughout my time in school. I've read about this term from several websites on the internet but did not specifically study it. Even before the apprenticeship, there was no briefing provided by the university to students regarding what was allowed and what was not allowed to do. But some of my friends who study at the faculty of communication science, they get courses related to intrapersonal and interpersonal communication, so they are better prepared to enter the world of work. My suggestion is that all majors should be given this course so that students are better prepared to enter the industrial world, or it can also be given in the form of debriefing prior to apprenticeship." (AI – fresh graduate of a Public University).

According to Yan, L. et al. (2018), soft skills differ from knowledge and hard skills in that they are more difficult to teach and develop. As a result, it is advised to set aside more time for training (Wickens, J.D.J. & D.H. Norris, 2018), which will allow students to practise the skill repeatedly while being supervised by a mentor (Mustikawati, R.I. et al., 2016).

When asked whether there is a collaborative learning in the lecture system, it turns out that out of 10 students, 8 said that on average the lecturers teach only in the form of one-way communication. It is very rare for lecturers to provide opportunities for students to work in groups or have discussions, so that students are not trained to think critically, analyse existing problems, and find solutions.

"The lecture system on my campus is only in the form of lectures, so that students listen more and occasionally ask questions. A learning system like this does not stimulate students to think critically because students only listen to the lecturer talk and if something is not clear students can ask questions. Students are also not trained enough to express their opinions, so they lack the courage to speak up and are never given the opportunity to discuss, analyse a problem and find a solution. (SE –fresh graduate of Public University).

This is consistent with Yulaelawati's opinion (in Widodo, 2012), according to which teachers and lecturers should assist students in expressing the thought processes they use to solve problems by, for instance, asking them to describe the stages they are thinking of. This is consistent with 21st century learning (Tohir, 2019b), which mandates that pupil be proficient in critical thinking, creative thinking, communicative thinking, and collaborative thinking.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that higher education, an institution charged with producing quality graduates, plays a significant role in developing students' character so that they become graduates with exceptional intrapersonal and interpersonal skills in addition to providing them with technical skills related to the fields of expertise they are studying (hard skills). Good technical skills do not guarantee workers can work well if they are not supported by good soft skills. To this day, a lot of higher institutions have not taught their students the value of striking a balance between hard abilities and soft skills in order to fulfil the needs of the workplace. Prior to internships, students need to receive training in interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. The limitation of this research is that this study does not discuss in detail about training of soft skills, therefore the researchers suggest that a study related to soft skills training strategies for college students can be conducted.

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