



## Soft Skills Training for English Classes to Develop Students' Quality

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### Abstract

Some training programs had been conducted to improve students' soft skills during their study at State of Islamic Institute (IAIN) of Lhokseumawe, but there was still a lack of consensus on the most effective approaches. The objective of this study is to investigate students' quality development by applying soft skills training. The population of the research was all English lecturers and All Students at first semester who took English Subject and the sample of this research was four English lecturers and 80 students of four Faculties in IAIN Lhokseumawe. Research and Development (R&D) was conducted to fulfill the needs of the research problem found in preliminary study. The preliminary data was collected using Focus Group Discussion. The researchers collected data on soft skills applied by students during the class and learning outcomes, such as test scores, completion rates, and questionnaires, and analyzed the results using statistical methods. The result shown that by conducting soft skill training can improve the students' soft skills quality. It can be understood that, soft skills training can bring significant effect to improve the students' soft skills quality. It can be applied continuously in English and other classes to show sustainability of the university program for getting better quality.

**Keywords:** *Development Strategies; English Classes; Product Development; Soft Skills training; Students' Quality.*

### Introduction

Soft skills refer to a set of personal attributes and social abilities that enable individuals to interact effectively with others and achieve their goals in various contexts. These skills are often intangible and difficult to quantify, but they are highly valued by employers and essential for success in the workplace and beyond. According to the World Economic Forum (2020), the most important soft skills for the future of work are: complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management, coordinating with others, emotional intelligence, judgment and decision making, service orientation, negotiation, and cognitive flexibility. Soft skills are increasingly recognized as key to professional success, and many organizations are

investing in training and development programs to help employees improve their communication, leadership, teamwork, and other soft skills. These skills are essential for university students to succeed not just in their academic pursuits but also in their future careers. Soft skill training for university students focuses on developing these important attributes to help students become well-rounded individuals who are prepared to succeed in their academic and professional lives. For students, developing soft skills is critical to success in both academic and personal lives. By developing these skills, students can improve their communication, problem-solving, leadership, and teamwork abilities, which will benefit them in any career path they choose to pursue.

There has been growing scientific interest in soft skill development in recent years, as researchers have come to recognize the important role that these skills play in personal and professional success. One area of interest has been in understanding how soft skills develop over time and how they can be effectively taught and learned. Studies have shown that while some soft skills may be innate or develop naturally through life experiences, others can be intentionally cultivated through targeted training and practice.

Researchers have also been interested in exploring the impact of soft skill development on various aspects of life, including academic and career success, social relationships, and overall well-being. For example, studies have found that individuals with strong soft skills tend to have better job performance, higher salaries, and greater job satisfaction. Another area of scientific interest has been in identifying the specific soft skills that are most important for success in various fields or contexts. For example, in the business world, communication, teamwork, and leadership skills are often highly valued, while in healthcare, empathy, emotional intelligence, and cultural competence are crucial.

One of the recent studies is soft skills training on employability conducted to graduates students (Pandey et al., 2022), examined the factors affecting employment, and the lack of soft skills is necessary. The researchers found that the emphasis has switched from hard skills paired with soft skills competency to competent human resources with high-quality hard skills. Higher education institutions in particular have started to realize that in order to educate students for the shifting demands of the industry, soft skill development is necessary. The majority of institutions have established projects and programs to help students develop their soft skills since they recognize how important these are. Most of these initiatives and programs

concentrate on increasing awareness through talks and workshops. The study concluded that soft skills training programs can be a valuable tool for enhancing students' employability and preparing them for success in the workforce.

The same study about soft skills training program on University Students' Professional Skills and Employability conducted by Kim & Kang (2021). This study examined the effectiveness of a soft skills training program for university students in South Korea. The program included training in communication, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. The researchers found that participation in the program was associated with significant improvements in students' professional skills and employability, as well as increased confidence in their ability to succeed in the workplace. The study concluded that soft skills training programs can be a valuable tool for enhancing students' employability and preparing them for success in the workforce.

Another study conducted to Ho Chin Minh City University of Food Industry (HUFI) students (Vy, 2021), examined the effectiveness of learning soft skills to HUFI students. Having strong soft skills is crucial for professional success and employability. Regardless of the industry, this is true for practically all fields. Businesses have high standards for the abilities of their personnel. Therefore, developing soft skills in university students is really essential. HUFI has also instituted the training of necessary and relevant soft skills for students in order to guarantee that they are completely equipped with these abilities. The study article focuses on the idea, function, and development of soft skills in the modern world and emphasizes the value of soft-skills education for HUFI students. Additionally, it demonstrates the value and appreciation of students' soft abilities.

A study related to soft skills and academic success also conducted by Kim & Lee (2020), examined the effectiveness of a soft skills training program for university students in South Korea. The program included training in communication, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. The researchers found that participation in the program was associated with significant improvements in students' professional skills and employability, as well as increased confidence in their ability to succeed in the workplace. The study concluded that soft skills training programs can be a valuable tool for enhancing students' employability and preparing them for success in the workforce.

Overall, these studies provide support for the idea that soft skills development can have a positive impact on academic and professional success, and highlight the importance of intentional training and development in these areas. The growing body of scientific research on soft skills underscores the importance of these skills for success and well-being in a variety of contexts, and highlights the potential benefits of intentional skill development and training.

While some researchers have been conducted on soft skills development, there are still several research gaps that exist. One gap is in understanding the most effective methods for teaching and assessing soft skills. While there are many training programs and interventions designed to improve soft skills, there is still a lack of consensus on what approaches are most effective, particularly in different contexts or for different skill sets.

Another gap is in identifying the long-term impacts of soft skill development. While studies have shown that individuals with strong soft skills tend to have better outcomes in various areas of life, it is still unclear whether these benefits persist over time or are sustained in the face of changing circumstances. Overall, while significant progress has been made in understanding soft skills development, there is still much to learn in order to fully understand how to effectively cultivate and utilize these skills in a variety of contexts.

Soft skills are part of the curriculum at the university level but are not explicitly taught in the classroom. In this instance, the lecturer can assist students not only to pass the exam but also to train and better understand their attitudes. The assistance is to develop their talents, and subsequently to find their path in the professional world. The soft skills development can help students to have better quality and it also can help university to provide better education quality (Roser et al., 2013).

It is a must for students to possess some skills that would be useful after graduation from a higher education. Students need to possess certain abilities and qualities that will be valuable in their daily lives since they will mix with people from backgrounds that may or may not be compatible with their own. The methods or techniques used in lectures encompass the process of achieving certain quality which includes soft skills (Elassy, 2015). Furthermore, teaching skills is the fundamental activity and mandatory based on the Goal of The United Nations' fourth Sustainable Development which is centered on the Quality Education. The UN expands on this

goal, noting that it is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nation, 2020).

To find out the most and best effective methods for teaching soft skills, this research is conducted. Soft skills training for university students can include workshops, seminars, group projects, simulations, and networking opportunities. The training may focus on communication skills, time management, problem-solving and critical thinking, emotional intelligence, leadership and teamwork, and professional development. By developing these skills, students can improve their ability to communicate effectively, manage their time, analyze complex situations, understand and manage their emotions, work collaboratively with others, and build positive relationships with professionals in their field of interest.

Since enhancing students' soft skills is a feature that lecturers and universities should take attention of, this study is primarily concentrated on strategies and methods for doing so. A vital educational activity that needs to be started very early is teaching soft skills. By the development of soft skills, this study aims to improve the quality of students soft skills at IAIN Lhokseumawe. A crucial educational activity that is best started at a young age is improving soft skills. Soft skills are part of the curriculum at the university level but are not part of the official curriculum. In this instance, the lecturer can assist the students in finding their way in the professional world by helping them train and better understand their attitudes, develop their talents, and find their position in the educational environment (Ciappei, 2015).

### **Research Methodology**

Borg and Gall defined Educational Research and Development (R & D) is a procedure used in the development and validation of educational items. The steps of this process, known as the R&D cycle, include researching research findings relevant to the product to be developed, creating the product based on these findings, field testing it in the eventual environment in which it will be used, and then revising it to address any flaws discovered during the field-testing stage. In more rigorous programs of R&D, this cycle is repeated until the field-test data indicate that the product meets its behaviorally defined objectives (Gall et al., 2003). Those steps had been conducted by researchers, yet to know whether the product development (in this case in the form of software product) effective or not to increase students' soft skill, experimental study

was conducted as part of try out or field testing. Since R&D is a mixed method kind of research, it would be make sense to apply it in this step.

FGD was conducted with all of the English subject lecturers from four faculties; Syariah, Education and Teacher Training, Ushuluddin, Adab and Dakwah, and Islamic Economics and Business Faculties, to investigate the problem of students' soft skills quality and provide the solution based on the students' needs which was concluded by giving them soft skills training. Later, questionnaires were given to the students to know whether training soft skill that was presented by experts of soft skills and also lecturers in teaching English in class could bring specific effect on their ability on understanding and practicing soft skill in their life was increased. The lecturers of English subject do not teach directly the theory of soft skills to the students but by practicing directly on the teaching learning process. Students needed soft skill most in facing their future career because the success of future career of someone is determined by having more soft skills than hard skill or technical skill.

The population of the research was all English lecturers and Students who took English Subject at IAIN Lhokseumawe, and the sample of this research were four English lecturers and 80 students of four Faculties of IAIN Lhokseumawe. Since the population is large, thus, the researchers used Slovin formula to take the sample from big population. This formula was used to make it easy to determine the proportional sample. Mathematically, Slovin formula can be written as follow:  $n = N / (1 + (N \times e^2))$ . Where n is the number of samples that is needed and N refers to the total population. Moreover Miles, Huberman stated that qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people. It tends to be purposive rather than random. In this research, the researcher only focuses on some respondents from one institution which was chosen purposively and examined deeply by using questionnaire as a way of collecting data (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

The data obtained from questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively. To test the validity of the data in the form of questionnaire, it was carried out statistically by using the Pearson Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation test. All of the data obtained was processed with computer software through the Program Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 25.0.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Findings**

The researchers found that soft skills training significantly improved students' soft skills quality and improved learning outcomes compared to the students who did not join the soft skills training. Students who got the soft skills training reported higher levels of soft skills quality, and achieved better test scores and completion rates. These findings suggest that soft skills training can be a valuable tool in promoting students' soft skills quality.

To know whether there was any improvement on student's soft skill, questionnaire was given to the students. It was given twice to the students, before and after the training. The result shown that testing the validity of the data in this study was carried out statistically, by using the Pearson Product-Moment Coefficient of Correlation test with the help of computer software through the Program Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 25.0. Based on the results of data processing, all statement items are declared valid because they have a significance value below 5%. If done manually then the correlation value of the calculation results obtained must be compared with the critical value of the product moment correlation. Each statement item is declared valid if  $r\text{-count} > r\text{-table}$  (critical value of correlation  $r$  product moment for  $n = 30$  in the attachment), so that all statements are significant and have construct validity.

There are differences in the soft skills of students before and after the training. This can be seen in the results of data processing using a different  $t$  test, which is comparing the results of the  $t$  test before training and after training. The test results shown the value of  $t$  before training = 79.079 <  $t$  after training 181.593. So there is a difference before and after training. The test results shown that the value of  $t\text{-count} = 24.623 > t\text{-table} = 1.66412$ . Thus, it can be proved that with training on soft skills, it can improve the soft skills of students.

### **Discussion**

Soft skills play a crucial role in language teaching, as they allow teachers to create a positive and supportive learning environment, facilitate communication and interaction between learners, and promote meaningful language learning. The soft skills training and followed by the teacher's role play for shown the differences in the soft skills of students' quality before and after the training. It is proved that with training

on soft skills, it can improve the soft skills of students. This result becomes one of the achievement related to government's goals for education that said for more than ten years the nation must develop "smart and competitive" people who can successfully compete for jobs and other opportunities in an increasingly globalized market (BANPT, 2019). In line with this goal, the government projects that by 2025, Indonesia's educational system will be "internationally competitive," and an increasing number of Indonesian universities will rank among the top 500 universities worldwide. Universities are expected to take a proactive role as the government's principal partner in providing human resources in order to be able to generate graduates who have a competitive advantage in global competitiveness.

The students as the next generation must be able to evolve into agents of production that are capable of bringing about genuine transformation. Education must function as a social safeguard, and this goes beyond simply delivering a formal education. It also refers to innovative education that fosters children's creativity and innovative abilities (Yaxley, 2018). As agents of innovation, the younger generation can make an important and considerable contribution to the implementation of appropriate sustainable development concepts. (Cimatti, 2016).

Soft skill training for university students can include workshops, seminars, group projects, simulations, and networking opportunities. The training may focus on communication skills, time management, problem-solving and critical thinking, emotional intelligence, leadership and teamwork, and professional development. By developing these skills, students can improve their ability to communicate effectively, manage their time, analyze complex situations, understand and manage their emotions, work collaboratively with others, and build positive relationships with professionals in their field of interest.

This study has same result related to some studies that had explored similar topics. Wijaya and Hariani accomplished a case study in the Economic-Social Education Department of Tarbiyah Faculty at IAIN Mataram on Students' Soft Skill Development Effort in Dealing with the Working World. This study was a qualitative approach, with interviews serving as the primary data collection tool. According to the data analysis, attempts to improve soft skills have not yet been optimized; however, certain efforts exist, such as conducting training, enhancing, developing, and defining training topics to draw students' attention to participate in soft skills training. Lack of engagement, awareness, and discipline are three issues that

students' sides of the attempt to build students' soft skills have to deal with. Additionally, there were challenges from the organizers, such as a lack of infrastructure, finance, and time. To overcome these challenges, various initiatives are being carried out, they are: socialization by posting flyers about upcoming soft skills training, raising students' awareness of the value of attending training, working with students who have already attended training, encouraging students to join departmental organizations to raise student awareness, and requiring students to be disciplined. (Wijaya & Hariani, 2015).

According to Aly's research, Indonesia's higher education level places a greater focus on hard-to-reach dimension abilities than on soft skills when students are learning in college. (Aly, 2017). This study produced two significant findings. First, lecturers can use soft skills to shape college graduates' character through student activities. Two alternative theories are presented here: (1) Thomas Lickona's value theory for character education (Lickona & Levis, 2003) or the Curriculum Center Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia; and (2) Sailah's theory of the different types of soft skills and their forms, which includes or combination of both personal and intra-personal soft skills (Sailah, 2008).

Muhmin has conducted library study on the value of developing soft skills in higher education. In this study, he came to the conclusion that university students must implement a curriculum and learning strategies centered on soft skills in order to meet the demands of the workforce in the globalized economy. The key to successful learning based on soft skills is to pay attention to student-centered teaching materials and techniques, in addition to having support from the institution. Lecturer competency to offer this method must be grade 4 and 5 level. (scale 1-5). The lecturer must be able to alter three fundamental assumptions: 1) that knowledge is the product of study construction or transformation; 2) that learning is a process of seeking out and creating (shaping) the active and specific knowledge; and 3) that teaching involves implementing a variety of strategies that can aid students in improving their study skills. (Muhmin, 2018).

The same study about soft skills has also done previously concerned about the Governance of Students' Soft Skills Development. The result of governance responsible demonstrated in three steps: planning, implementing, and assessing. The development constructed by using hard ware provided by the lecturers as a lesson plans for the semester that had been properly implemented, and the soft skills

evaluation included in the assessment (Nurlaila & Fadhillah, 2022). While this research is the follow up study which provide other ways to develop the quality of students' soft skills by conducting soft skills training as a form of software.

One of the approaches to soft skills development is the use of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technology. VR and AR offer an immersive and interactive environment that allows individuals to practice and develop their soft skills in a safe and controlled setting. For example, VR can be used to simulate workplace scenarios such as public speaking, negotiation, and conflict resolution, allowing individuals to practice these skills in a realistic and interactive way. AR can be used to provide real-time feedback on communication and social skills during face-to-face interactions.

Another approach to soft skill development is the use of gamification. Gamification involves incorporating game elements into training and development programs to increase engagement and motivation. For example, a training program for communication skills may be designed as a game where individuals earn points for successfully navigating different communication scenarios.

A third approach to soft skill development is through the use of personalized coaching and feedback. Rather than relying solely on standardized training programs, personalized coaching and feedback can provide individuals with tailored guidance on their strengths and areas for improvement. This approach can help individuals develop their soft skills in a more targeted and effective way.

Overall, these novel approaches to soft skill development offer promising avenues for enhancing the effectiveness of soft skill training and promoting long-term skill retention and application in real-world contexts. These approaches were included in the training conducted by the lecturers.

Five essential soft skills for students were trained and investigated. Based on the result of questionnaire given for students after the soft skills training, there were improvements occurred to the students. During the training the students has directed to do some activities related to the soft skills needs. The results of five skills were (1) Communication Skills; students have the ability to communicate effectively is essential in all aspects of life. Students who possess strong communication skills can express themselves clearly and confidently, listen actively, and adapt their communication style to different situations. According to research conducted by the National

Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), strong communication skills are among the most sought-after skills by employers (NACE Job Outlook 2021, 2020).

(2) Time Management; with effective time management skills enable students to prioritize tasks, set goals, and meet deadlines. By learning to manage their time effectively, students can balance academic work, extracurricular activities, and personal commitments. Research has shown that effective time management is positively correlated with academic success (Cyril, 2015).

(3) Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking: Students who possess strong problem-solving and critical thinking skills are able to analyze complex situations, identify potential solutions, and make informed decisions. These skills are essential in all areas of life, including academic work and future careers (Abrami et al., 2015).

(4) Emotional Intelligence; students have the ability to understand and manage one's emotions and those of others. Students who possess strong emotional intelligence can build positive relationships with others, manage stress effectively, and navigate challenging situations. Research has shown that emotional intelligence is positively correlated with academic and personal success (Brackett et al., 2011).

(5) Leadership and Teamwork; students can work collaboratively with others, build consensus, and motivate and inspire others. These skills are essential for success in academic work, extracurricular activities, and future careers (Kourkouta & Papathanasiou, 2014).

Figure 1  
Students Soft Skills Development



## Conclusion and Suggestion

The materials of lesson plan as the form of hardware and the soft skills training had been tried out to the students. To prove whether the soft skills materials and training developed effectively or not to be used in the institution, it had been proven by the result of calculation of questionnaire. Based on the result of tried out, it showed that the materials were appropriate as teaching learning materials for English subject students in developing their soft skills understanding and can bring positive effect on their attitude in communicating daily both formal and informal situations, by having this good habit forth it can increase the soft skills of the students and graduate students to face their future career.

In conclusion, soft skills are essential for students to succeed in both academic and personal lives. By developing communication skills, time management, problem-solving, emotional intelligence, and leadership and teamwork abilities, students can improve their chances of academic success, personal growth, and career advancement. The lecturers can continuously apply the approaches as a way of training soft skills can be practiced as daily scheduled so that can bring positive effect on students' attitude in building this good habit and at last resulted to the way they behave with people around them both in the working place and in society in general. Training soft skills and developing certain teaching materials not only be appropriate for English class as specified in this study but also for other subject included in curriculum at university level.

It is suggested that the lecturers should apply this result of development, to modify the model of teaching-learning process. Lecturers always include soft skills continuously as a real training in their daily teaching both in the materials and also in the explanation. Lecturers give model in every session of meetings so that it would be followed by the students, to do themselves first every good thing then ask the students to do, to show good ways of communication not only in class but also outside class.

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