



Implementation of 21st Century Soft Skills in Vocational High Schools to Face the Workforce

Tisa¹, Nuraini Asriati², Syamsuri³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Tanjungpura Pontianak, Indonesia

Corresponding Author:  F2191221014@student.untan.ac.id

ABSTRACT

SMK must prepare students to enter the world of work with a better competitive advantage. Soft skills are one of the important keys in the modern world of work. Therefore, SMKs need to pay attention to the development of soft skills in students so that they are ready to face future challenges in the industrial world and the business world. This study aims to analyze the types and methods of developing soft skills that are implemented in Vocational High Schools. The research method used is qualitative research with a library research approach. The results of the study revealed that: The process of learning soft skills is not only knowledge delivery but must be able to create competent students both personally and interpersonally with the development of a soft skills curriculum in Vocational High Schools (SMK), the types of soft skills that need to be developed in the SMK Curriculum include the ability communication, cooperation, leadership, and adaptability. By implementing the right soft skill development strategy.

Vocational Secondary Schools, Soft Skill, Curriculum Development

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received

01 April 2024

Revised

20 May 2024

Accepted

01 Juni 2024

Key Word

How to cite

Doi

<https://pusdikra-publishing.com/index.php/jsr/index>

[10.51178/jsr.v5i2.1974](https://doi.org/10.51178/jsr.v5i2.1974)



This work is licensed under a

[Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the competition in the job market is extremely tight with demands coming from all directions, especially concerning the quality of Human Resources (HR). High-quality HR capable of keeping up with advancements has a greater chance of surviving in the job market. Additionally, the era of Industry 4.0 presents new challenges with the opening of opportunities for international cooperation. Therefore, improving the quality of HR is a crucial factor in achieving national development programs. This development requires HR to be competitive, adaptive, anticipatory, skilled, flexible, and eager to learn new things. Superior HR must possess adequate hard skills and soft skills, which should be nurtured from the time they undergo formal education.

Vocational High School (SMK) is an educational pathway that teaches students to master scientific knowledge and enhance their skills. Graduates from SMK are prepared to enter the workforce directly. This is in line with Regulation of the Minister of National Education No. 23 of 2006, where Vocational High Schools (SMK) must excel in their competency programs to meet the demands of the job market or pursue higher education in their respective fields, thus producing graduates ready to enter the workforce. Certainly, the aspects of hard skills and soft skills are very important. However, in reality, what is more needed in the working world is the balance between soft skills and hard skills (Adamson et al., 2017). According to research at Harvard University, USA, success in HR is not solely determined by technical abilities and knowledge, but rather by soft skills (self-management and interpersonal skills). The study reveals that 20% of a person's success comes from hard skills and the remaining 80% from soft skills. This underscores the significant role of soft skills in education, particularly in Vocational High Schools (SMK).

Unfortunately, field data shows that many vocational school graduates are still unemployed. This aligns with Paramita's opinion in Sandroto (2018), which reveals that the statistics of vocational school graduates are alarming, with only 50% of them finding immediate employment and 1-2% becoming entrepreneurs. The underemployment of vocational school graduates is certainly related to their educational institutions. Nowadays, educational institutions focus more on developing mastery of knowledge and technology, resulting in a relatively low emphasis on the development of soft skills (Expert Team of Jati Diri Bangsa Foundation, cited in Didik Suryanto, 2013). However, the readiness of graduates to enter the business world or the industrial world involves three important factors: learning and work experience (hard skills), physiological aspects related to physical condition, body organs, and age maturity, as well as psychological aspects concerning emotional, mental, and social conditions (soft skills).

Soft skills themselves are aspects that cannot be seen with the naked eye, yet their influence is significant in a person's life. Graduates who possess good soft skills can influence themselves to become better individuals (Lie and Darmasetiawan, 2017). Of course, these abilities are advantageous for the company itself. Meanwhile, the benefit of mastering soft skills for students is to develop their careers and to persevere through various challenges within the workplace.

If we look at the current education system, it has indeed undergone changes. However, the efforts of the Indonesian Government to enhance soft skills are seen to be limited. Yet, there is significant demand in the job market for vocational school graduates who possess strong soft skills. There should be efforts to implement appropriate learning approaches to develop these skills. This approach could involve engaging learning systems that enhance interdisciplinary integration. Soft skills should

not be practiced just once or twice; they need to be used in daily life so that students become accustomed to applying them.

Therefore, the author conducted a literature review on 'Implementing 21st Century Soft Skills in Vocational Schools to Face the Job Market.' The aim of this research is to describe the role and contribution of soft skills in vocational school graduates in preparing for the workforce, so that the education sector can realize a curriculum that emphasizes soft skills in vocational schools.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this analysis, the research type used is qualitative research with a library research approach. The data collection technique employed is documentation. The research instrument used is the researcher themselves, gathering data from scientific journal articles and online books via Google Scholar. Data collection is limited to a 10-year period and aligned with the research theme "Implementation of 21st Century Soft Skills in Vocational High Schools in Facing the Workforce." This literature review or library study provides relevant theories to address research problems. It can also be understood as a process conducted to solve a problem, fundamentally relying on in-depth and critical examination of relevant literary materials.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research focuses on the implementation of 21st century soft skills in Vocational Schools in preparation for the workforce, aiming to establish a soft skills training curriculum in vocational schools. Below, the author presents several previous research findings along with the differences compared to this study

Firstly, research on soft skills has been conducted by Mexsi Mutia Rissa and Mujiyanti titled 'The Role of Soft Skills in the Work Readiness of Pharmacy Department Students in Vocational Schools.' The research findings revealed that statistical analysis using chi-square obtained an Asymp.sig value of 0.000, indicating significance level less than 0.05. This data shows a relationship between the role of soft skills and students' readiness for work. Awareness of the importance of possessing soft skills is crucial to support personal quality so that students can be prepared for work.

Secondly, the second research was conducted by Delta Apriyani et al. titled 'The Importance of Soft Skills for Vocational School Students.' The research findings revealed that soft skills play a significant role in enhancing the maturity of vocational school students to enter the workforce. Therefore, the education sector needs to pay attention to the soft skills of vocational school graduates.

Thirdly, the next relevant research was authored by Widarto titled 'Education of Soft Skills and Hard Skills for Vocational School Students to Prepare Skilled Workers.' The research findings revealed that there are three models of education to develop both

soft skills and hard skills: (1) Vocational Schools, (2) Cooperative Systems, and (3) Combined Education and Training. These models need to be implemented with appropriate curriculum structures and learning strategies

Lastly, there is a study conducted by Didik Suryanto et al. titled 'The Relevance of Soft Skills Required by the Business/Industrial World with Those Taught in Vocational Schools.' The research findings revealed that the necessary soft skills include: (1) good behavior and honesty, (2) sense of responsibility, (3) time discipline, (4) working safely, (5) resilience and perseverance in work, (6) ability to handle stress, (7) independence, and (8) openness to feedback from superiors.

From the four previous studies, they actually share the same relevance regarding the influence of students' soft skills on the workforce. The difference is that none of these studies attempted to encourage the education sector to create an educational curriculum specifically focused on teaching soft skills in vocational schools.

The definition of soft skills

According to Ichasan in Zainul Anwar (2020), generally, soft skills refer to developing abilities in the workplace. For example, a contractor who can design and construct buildings is considered to have hard skills, but the ability to communicate with clients and work effectively with colleagues is regarded as a soft skill. Soft skills are key to a better life. With these abilities, there are more opportunities for success, having many friends, and establishing broader relationships. However, these advantages are only valuable if they are applied in daily life. According to Simpson in Sopokui (2021:6-7), soft skills are personal and interpersonal skills that are intangible or not visibly apparent.

In short, soft skills are internal qualities within a person that are not visibly apparent, such as emotional intelligence. Individuals with strong soft skills can control their anger in public settings. Moreover, learning soft skills is part of developing a professional attitude. This attitude can influence the quality, speed, accuracy, reputation management, time management, and efficiency in performing work tasks.

The role of soft skills in self-improvement

In this modern era, human resources (SDM) play a crucial role in the millennial workforce. This is because the working world heavily relies on knowledge. This is consistent with Joseph L. Badaracco's statement in Zainul Anwar (2020:12) that knowledge is the currency source in modern economic competition, and entrepreneurs aiming for growth must acquire it by any means necessary. Therefore, human resources with good knowledge play a central role in creating efficient and effective processes to produce products that meet customer desires.

Currently, the workforce is facing issues with human resources lacking adequate soft skills. Yet, these skills are crucial for companies as they involve human relationships, such as understanding personal dynamics, conflict resolution, and

negotiation. This is because soft skills play a role in enhancing someone's ability to manage diversity due to the influence of the work environment (Sucipto in Zainul Anwar, 2020:13).

Contribution of Soft Skills in Career Development

The rapid social changes in this modern era are prompting the education sector to reform its systems. Schools, which traditionally focused solely on academic competencies for their graduates, must now supplement these with other competencies, specifically soft skills.

Soft skills, comprising attitudes, values, character, personal and interpersonal skills, are crucial factors in all aspects of life, especially in the workforce. A study conducted by Mitsubishi Research Institute cited in Taufiqullah Dahlan et al. (2020:60) indicates that the success of graduates is not solely determined by academic and technical skills; 40% is contributed by emotional and social maturity, 30% by networking processes, 20% by academic abilities, and 10% by financial skills. Therefore, employees must not only master technical competencies but also possess strong character, clear life attitudes, skills for building relationships with others, and other personal skills.

In the 21st century, nearly every company demands that employees possess a combination of soft and hard skills regardless of their position. This trend is evident in job advertisements that prioritize communication, teamwork, and interpersonal relationship skills. From this perspective, the contribution of soft skills is highly valued in career advancement and performance.

The Role and Contribution of Soft Skills in Vocational High Schools in Facing the World of Work. After gathering extensive data from various literature and research journals, the author found several findings regarding the role and contribution of soft skills in Vocational High Schools (SMK) in preparing students for the workforce. Below are two pieces of evidence regarding the condition of soft skill education in SMK.

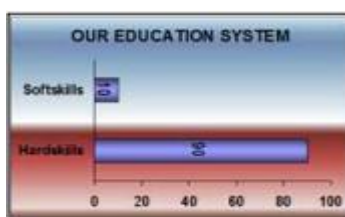


Figure 1. Percentage of Soft Skills in the Workforce

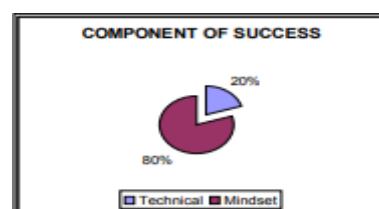


Figure 2. Education of Soft Skills in the Education World

Source: Neff and Citrin in Siti Mariah and Machmud Sugandi, 2018

According to Figure 1 and 2, it can be observed that education in Indonesia focuses on teaching around 80% technical and academic skills, or hard skills, in Vocational High Schools (SMKs), while soft skills account for only about 20%. However,

in the workforce, around 80% of the skills needed are soft skills, with hard skills comprising about 20%. This indicates a reversal from the actual education provided in Vocational High Schools.

This situation poses a significant challenge for the education sector to carefully design curricula. Therefore, the process of teaching soft skills should not only focus on knowledge delivery but also aim to develop competent students in both personal and interpersonal aspects. This aligns with the views of Siti Mariah and Machmud Sugandi (2018:3-4), suggesting that soft skills can be honed and improved through learning experiences. Hence, there needs to be a shift in mindset where SMK education should not solely concentrate on teaching hard skills but should integrate both hard and soft skills synergistically.

Soft skills themselves have an important role and contribution to Vocational High Schools (SMK). The reason is, in learning soft skills, there are several aspects that can make SMK graduates have strong characters according to the needs of the workforce. Even in the working world, points in employee recruitment prioritize soft skill abilities. The working world values that people with superior soft skills are able to complete their work well. In addition, these abilities make employees more productive with the development of time. This opinion is even supported by Widarto et al. (2015) in their research findings stating that a business leader said, attitude skills have the highest position among workers. This data can be seen in Figure 3 below.

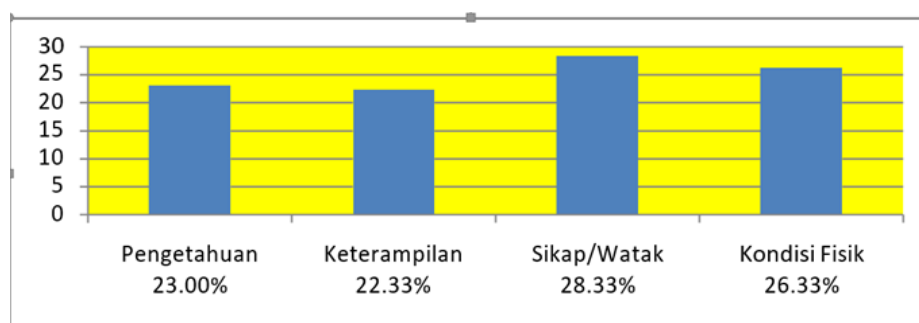


Figure 3.

Company Leaders' Opinions

(Source: Widarto, Pardjono, and Widodo, N. 2015)

From the figure, it is clear that an employee's attitude or character accounts for 28.33%. This proves that the attitude of an employee is crucial to company leaders compared to their knowledge. However, knowledge also plays a role, but the employee can manage themselves well through their attitude. This trait or character is one aspect of soft skill ability.

Actually, it's not just attitude that is needed to develop soft skills. There are other aspects considered important in the working world and that participants must know. The working world is not only focused on completing tasks, but also involves

relationships between people. To ensure these relationships are smooth and work progresses well, someone must have honesty and discipline.

In reality, educational institutions have not fully supported the crisis in soft skill capabilities among vocational high school graduates. This issue creates a gap between expectations and responses among these graduates. There is an inequality between the human resource needs in the workforce and the soft skill capabilities of vocational high school graduates. In practice, this situation leads to many vocational high school graduates being unable to enter the workforce due to their low soft skill abilities.

Curriculum Structure for Soft Skill Training Based on the above discussion, teaching competence is required to achieve a soft skill education curriculum with a simple model that can be easily accepted by participants. One way is through the types of subjects used. Siti Mariah and Machmud Sugandi (2018) revealed that alternative types of subjects that can be used include:

- (1) mandatory subjects based on the national curriculum;
- (2) Fundamentals of Communication;
- (3) Applied Mathematics;
- (4) Computer;
- (5) Scientific Method;
- (6) Indonesian Language;
- (7) English Language;
- (8) Project Work and Entrepreneurship;
- (9) Vocational Practice.

The proposed subjects' names are only used during school education. When participants are in a work environment, the soft skill lessons they have acquired blend with their daily activities. Therefore, schools should not rely solely on materials and techniques; continuous activities are needed to enhance the soft skills of vocational high school participants.

Factors Influencing the Development of Soft Skills

The development of soft skills is influenced by environmental factors and students' characteristics. Environmental factors include the timing and temperature during learning activities. Learning in hot temperatures can deplete energy and lead students to fatigue more quickly. Consequently, concentration can be disrupted and become unfocused. Additionally, the development of soft skills is influenced by the characteristics of the students themselves, such as age and habits. Typically, a person's highest level of ability is around the age of 25, after experiencing various learning opportunities. In terms of habits, males tend to use physical activities while females engage more in mental activities. Indirectly, this can contribute to rapid development of soft skills in females (Zainul Anwar et al., 2020:13-14).

Vocational High School (SMK)

According to Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Vocational High Schools (SMK) are defined as educational institutions that prepare students to enter the workforce in their respective vocational fields. To elaborate further, Government Regulation No. 19 of 2005, which outlines the National Education Standards, defines that vocational secondary education prioritizes the development of students' skills in specific vocational fields. According to the Minister of Education and Culture's decree, the objectives of vocational education (SMK) are as follows:

1. Enhancing students' abilities as members of society to establish reciprocal relationships with culture, social environments, and surroundings.
2. Preparing students to continue their education to higher levels.
3. Equipping students to enter the workforce and develop professional attitudes.
4. Improving students' abilities to self-develop in line with knowledge, arts, and technology.

CONCLUSION

In the workplace, soft skills constitute about 80% of the required skills, with hard skills making up approximately 20%. Therefore, the process of learning soft skills should not only focus on knowledge delivery but also aim to cultivate competent participants in both personal and interpersonal aspects. This is crucial because soft skill education encompasses various aspects that enable vocational high school graduates to possess strong characters that meet the demands of the workforce.

One critical aspect highly valued in the workplace is attitude. Both business leaders and employees consider attitude as the foundation of the highest capability in soft skill education. However, educational institutions have not fully supported the crisis in soft skill capabilities among vocational high school graduates. This issue creates a gap between the expectations and responses of vocational high school graduates in relation to the workforce. The author suggests that educational institutions should develop a soft skill education curriculum with a simple model that can be easily accepted by participants.

REFERENCES

- Anwar , Zainul., dkk. Pendamping Soft Skill Pada siswa-siswi SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Malang. *Journal of community servies*. Vol. 1, NO. 1 (2020).
- Apriyani, Delta., dkk. Keutamaan Soft Skill Bagi Siswa Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan. *Jurnal Teknobuga*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2020).
- Innovation in Afrika dan Asia (1st ed. 2017). Springer International publishing: Imprint: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-49485-2>

- Lie, N. L. C., Darmasetiawan. N. K. 2017. Pengaruh Soft Skill Terhadap Kesiapan Kerja Menghadapi Masyarakat Ekonomi Asean Pada Mahasiswa S1 Fakultas Bisnis dan Ekonomika Universitas Surabaya. *Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Universitas Surabaya*. Vol.6 No.2 (2017).
- Mexsi Mutia Rissa dan Mujiyanti. Peran Soft Skil Terhadap Kesiapan Kerja Siswa Jurusan Farmasi di Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan. *Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia*, Vol. 7, No. 8 (2022).
- Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional No. 23 Tahun 2006, Jakarta:Depdiknas.
- PP No.19 Tahun 2005 yang berisi tentang Standar Pendidikan Nasional.
- Rifai, Mad. *Kesiapan Soft Skill Siswa SMK N 5 Semarang Untuk Memasuki Dunia Kerja*. Skripsi:Unnes (2015).
- Sandroto, Christine Winstinindah., Riyanti, Benedicta Prihatin Dwi., and Warmiyati, M.Tri. 2018. Entrepreneurial Intention and Competencies of Vocational and High School Graduates in Indonesia. *Pertanika Journal Social Sciences & Humanities*. 26 (T).
- Siti Mariah dan Machmud Sugandi. *Kesenjangan Soft Skill Lulusan SMK Dengan Kebutuhan Tenaga Kerja di Industri*. Artikel Mahasiswa Program Studi PTK PPS UNY (2018).
- Sopokui. *Soft Skill Yang Penting Di Era Digital*. Jakarta: Elementa Media (2021).
- Suryanto, Didik., dkk. Relevansi soft skill yang dibutuhkan dunia usaha/Industri dengan yang dibelajarkan di sekolah menengah kejuruan. *Jurnal Teknologi dan Kejuruan*, vol 36,No. 2 (2013:107-118).
- Taufiqulloh Dahlan, dkk. *Soft Skill Kewirausahaan*. Bandung: Lemlit Unpas (2020).
- Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional. Jakarta:Depdiknas.
- Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan.
- Widarto, Pardjono, dan Widodo, N. 2015. Pentingnya Pendidikan Soft Skills bagi Siswa SMK dalam Menyiapkan Tenaga Kerja yang Diperlukan Dunia Usaha dan Industri. Lumbung Pustaka Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta.
- Widarto. *Pendidikan Soft Skill dan Hard Skill Bagi Siswa SMK untuk Menyiapkan Tenaga kerja Terampil*. Semnas LPPMUNY (2012)