

Soft Skills among Students: A Case Study of UiTM Cawangan Kelantan

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Abstract

This article contributes to ongoing debates about soft skills among students. In 2017, the unemployment rate in Malaysia was at 3.42 percent as compared to 2.85 percent in 2014. Education system must aim towards employability and ensure quality in education to reduce the percentage of unemployment. Thus, this study aims to investigate the development of soft skills among students through co-curriculum activities in UiTM Cawangan Kelantan. The sample were 113 students from UiTM Cawangan Kelantan. Questionnaires adapted from previous research to measure the communication skill, problem solving skill, team building skill, leadership skill and soft development of soft skills among students through co-curriculum activities. SEM-PLS 3.0 were employed in this study. The findings revealed only team building skill has significant influence on developments of soft skills among students through co-curriculum activities. However, the study indicates that communication skill, problem solving skill and leadership skill are not significant towards development of soft skills among students through co-curriculum activities.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Communication, Problem Solving, Team Building, Leadership

Introduction

Soft skills are a combination of people's skills, social skills, communication skills, character traits, attitudes, career attribute, social intelligence and emotional intelligence quotients among others that enable people to navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals with complementing hard skills (Robles, 2012). Soft skills are the most frequent term that we have heard everywhere we go and have been the number one requirement in the job application. Soft skills are important because we are able to gain a further understanding of tasks and successfully engage with them, enabling them to gain more control over their learning. As well as playing an important role in the development of students' overall personality and performance, soft skills also amount to good skills in communication; presenting information in a clear and concise manner; team-building ability; leadership; time management; group discussions; and interviews and interpersonal skills. All of which are important for students' academic development and growth (Schulz, 2008).

Youth unemployment rate is three times higher than the national average unemployment rate – 10 in 100 youths are unemployed compared to three in 100 workers of all ages. While the World Bank reported that Malaysian employers are struggling to source talent, one in four graduates has remained jobless six months after graduation (Bee Yin, 2018). Moreover, Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia (2006), said,

as graduates must have the element of soft skills to measure their abilities to communicate in English language (communication), critical thinking and problem solving, must work as teams, develop business proposals and identify business opportunities (entrepreneurial skill), apply ethical principles and have, plan, supervise, monitor and lead (leadership) ,build relationship, interact and work effectively (lifelong learning and information management) and professional ethics. Therefore, this study is aimed to address the development of soft skills in students through co-curriculum activity and its relation with employment nowadays. The study used the students from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Kelantan who were asked about the soft skills that they acquired through co-curriculum activities in university.

Literature Review

According to Evenson (1999), the term soft skills has been around a long time in both business and educational fields, in corporate meetings, and in curriculum development. The real soft skills definition is not about skills in the traditional sense. The Collins English Dictionary as cited by Heckman and Kautz (2012) defines the term soft skills as “desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude”. Soft skills are character traits, attitudes, and behaviors—rather than technical aptitude or knowledge. Soft skills are the intangible, nontechnical, personality-specific skills that determine one’s strengths as a leader, facilitator, mediator, and negotiator. Soft skills are character traits that enhance a person’s interactions, job performance, and career prospects (Parsons, 2008). The greatest feature of soft skills is that the application of these skills is not limited to one’s profession. Soft skills are continually developed through practical application during one’s approach toward everyday life and the workplace (Arkansas Department of Education, 2007; Magazine, 2003). Unlike hard skills, which are about a person’s skill set and ability to perform a certain type of task or activity, soft skills are interpersonal and broadly applicable (Parsons, 2008).

Much research has been done on the importance of soft skills in the workplace (Klaus, 2008; Maes, Weldy, & Icenogel, 1997). One study found that 75% of long-term job success depends on people skills, while only 25% is dependent on technical knowledge (Klaus, 2008). Another study indicated that hard skills contribute only 15% to one’s success, whereas 85% of success is due to soft skills (Watts & Watts, 2008, as cited in John, 2009). As employers are progressively looking for employees who are mature and socially well adjusted, they rate soft skills as number one in importance for entry-level success on the job (Wilhelm, 2004).

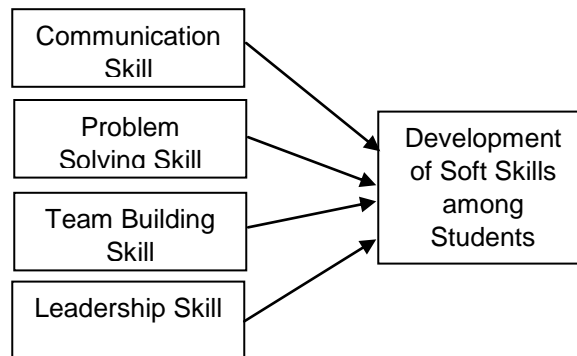


Figure 1: Proposed Framework

Methodology

This study used quantitative approach to test the questionnaires in order to get reliable results. Judgmental sampling was used and the subjects are chosen to be part of the sample with a specific purpose in mind. For this study, subjects were chosen among the students who actively involved in co-curriculum activity. The study involved 113 numbers of students from UiTM Cawangan Kelantan. The data was collected by using questionnaires. After the major data collection, 113 completed questionnaires were returned and the raw data was manually keyed in through SPSS version 22.0 and analyzed by using the Structural Equation Modelling-Partial Least Square 3.0.

Result and Discussion

Respondents' Demographic Profiles

Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution by demographic profile

Demographic	N	%
Age		
18 years old and below	8	7
19-20 years old	96	85
21-22 years old	9	8
23-24 years old	0	0
25 years old and above	0	0
Total	113	100
Gender		
Female	84	74.3
Male	29	25.7
Total	113	100
Faculty		
Faculty of Information Management	32	28.3
Faculty of Business and Management	13	11.5
Faculty of Accountancy	37	32.7
Faculty of Art and Design	4	3.5
Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics	21	18.6
Faculty of Administration	6	5.3
Total	113	100

A total of 113 respondents involved in the study and summarized in Table 1 as above. For age of the respondents, 7.0 percent were 18 years old and below, 85.0 percent were 19-20 years old, and 8.0 percent were 21-22 years old. For the 74.3 percent of the total numbers of respondents were female, while 25.7 percent were male. For the 32.7 percent of the respondents were from faculty of accountancy, 28.3 percent were from faculty of information management, 18.6 percent were from faculty of computer science and mathematics, 11.5 percent were from faculty of business management and 5.3 percent were from faculty of administration. When the respondents were asked about the involvement in club/association, 91.2 percent of the respondents were involved in club/association, while 8.8 percent do not involve in club/association in university.

Normality

Normality test was conducted and measure using skewness and kurtosis. Normality test was used to determine if a data significantly deviate from a normal distribution.

Table 2: Normality Result

	Soft Skills	Communication Skills	Problem Solving Skills	Team Building Skills	Leadership Skills
Skew-ness	-0.527	-0.016	-0.320	-0.317	-0.176
Kurto-sis	0.027	-0.641	-0.216	-0.381	-0.613

Based on the above Table 2, the result of normality test range was from -0.641 to 0.027, considered that all value is acceptable. According to George and Mallery (2016) the value between -2 and +2 are acceptable and consider as normal. It means that all variables that were used in this study are normal. Thus, the researcher can proceed to further analysis.

Reliability Analysis

In common, Cronbach’s alpha was used to measure the reliability and value of less than 0.60 are considered to be poor, whereas the value that close to 0.70 are considered good and the value that over 0.80 are considered to be high (Amiri et al., 2010). The average alpha values of variables for every section are shown in Table 3 below.

According to the Reliability Test, the overall value of Cronbach’s Alpha for developing soft skills in students through co-curriculum activities was 0.936 or 93.6 percent. According to Cronbach’s Alpha, the value of Communication Skills was 0.932 or 93.2 percent. Moreover, Cronbach’s Alpha’s value of 0.932 or 93.2 percent was for Problem Solving Skills. Moreover, the Cronbach’s Alpha value shown for Leadership Skills was 0.936 or 93.6 percent. Lastly, the value of Cronbach’s Alpha for Team Building Skills was 0.932 or 93.2 percent. To conclude Table 1.2 below, the Cronbach’s Alpha values were higher for all variables with the Cronbach’s Alpha value 0.946 or 94.6 percent.

Table 3: Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Soft Skills among Students	0.936
Communication Skills	0.932
Problem Solving Skills	0.932
Leadership Skills	0.936
Team Building Skills	0.932

Multicollinearity

Multicollinearity occurs when there are correlations among variables. According to Tabachnick and Fidell (1996) this happens if a correlation between two or more variables is 0.9 or greater and in order to overcome this problem, one of the variables is removed from further analysis.

Table 4: Correlation Coefficient

	Soft Skills	Communi- cation Skills	Problem Solving Skills	Team Building Skills	Leader- ship Skills
Soft Skills among Students	1				
Communi- cation Skill	0.780**	1			
Problem Solving Skill	0.763**	0.804**	1		
Team Building Skills	0.797**	0.791**	0.787**	1	
Leadership Skill	0.736**	0.772**	0.795**	0.773**	1

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)*

As all of the measures of correlation for the variables are below 0.9, it can be concluded that there is no multicollinearity problem. This is illustrated above in Table 4.

Construct Validity

Table 5: Construct validity and Reliability

Constructs	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR
Soft Skills	SB1	0.904	0.755	0.925
	SB2	0.896		
	SB3	0.906		
Communication Skill	SC1	0.847	0.756	0.903
	SC2	0.889		
	SC3	0.871		
Problem Solving Skill	SD1	0.930	0.850	0.944
	SD2	0.926		
	SD3	0.910		
Team Building Skill	SE1	0.921	0.840	0.940
	SE2	0.932		
	SE3	0.897		
Leadership Skill	SF1	0.853	0.795	0.921
	SF2	0.914		
	SF3	0.906		

AVE: Average Variance extracted; CR: Composite Reliability

Hair, Ringle and Sarstedt (2011) claimed the quality of the measurement model was assessed by examining convergent validity includes factor loading, average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR). The above Table 5 shown that, results show that indicator loadings for all items exceeded the recommended value of 0.5 (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010). AVE were in the range of 0.755 to 0.850, which is above the recommended value of 0.5, and CR ranged from 0.903 to 0.944 which exceeded recommended value of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010).

Discriminant Validity

The utmost common method of validating the discriminant validity as suggested by Hair et al. (2010) and Fornell and Larcker (1981) the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct is greater than the correlation between the constructs. The below Table 6 indicate that there is adequate discriminant validity since the diagonal elements are significantly greater than the off-diagonal elements in the corresponding rows and columns.

Table 6: Discriminant validity

	Commu- nication Skill	Leader- ship Skill	Problem Solving Skill	Soft Skills	Team Buildi ng Skill
Commu-nication Skill	0.869				
Leader-ship Skill	0.776	0.891			
Problem Solving Skill	0.808	0.797	0.922		
Soft Skills	0.782	0.743	0.769	0.869	
Team Building Skill	0.794	0.775	0.789	0.800	0.916

Hypotheses

Path analysis was performed to evaluate the structural model. Based on Hair et al. (2011), the primary evaluation criteria for structural model are R^2 values and the level of significance of the path coefficients.

Based on Cohen (1988) for a good model, the value of R^2 of endogenous latent variable should be more than 0.26. The R^2 was found for this path model is 0.718, indicating that communication skill, problem solving skill, team building skill and leadership skill can account for 71.8 percent of the variance in soft skills among students, which represent a substantial range.

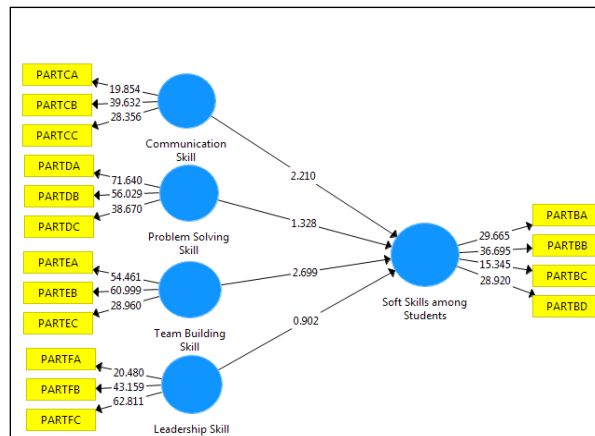


Figure 2: Structural Model

Table 7: Hypotheses Result

Hypothesis	beta	t values	p-values	Result
H1: Communication Skill – Soft Skills	0.115	2.210	0.028	Not Supported
H2: Problem Solving Skill – Soft Skills	0.138	1.328	0.185	Not Supported
H3: Team Building Skill – Soft Skills	0.133	2.699	0.007	Supported
H4: Leadership Skill – Soft Skills	0.133	0.902	0.368	Not Supported

For H1, the result indicates ($\beta = 0.115$, $t\text{-values}=2.210$), which shows communication skill was found to not have a significant relationship with the development of soft skills among students through co-curriculum activities. Hence H1 was not supported. For H2, problem solving skill also does not have a significant relationship with the development of soft skills among students through co-curriculum activities with result indicates ($\beta = 0.138$, $t\text{-values}=1.328$). Hence H2 also was not supported. For H3, the result indicates ($\beta = 0.133$, $t\text{-values}=2.699$), which shows team building skill was found to have a significant relationship with development of soft skills among students through co-curriculum activities. Hence H3 was supported. Finally, for H4, leadership skill does not have a significant relationship with the development of soft skills among students through co-curriculum activities with result indicates ($\beta = 0.133$, $t\text{-values}=0.902$). Hence H4 was not supported.

Conclusion

The study was conducted to investigate the development of soft skills among students through co-curriculum activities. In the data, team building skill are concluded to be significantly linked to the development of soft skills among students through co-curriculum activities, while the communication skill, problem solving skill and leadership skill are concluded to be not significant in this study. To conclude, the skills that are not significant can be developed when the students do assignments in class or when they join the training camps. Other than that, the skills stated above have a big impact because the factors employed high R squared value.

In a nutshell, the issues of unemployment among students increase due to the lack of soft skills can be fixed by exposing to students about the importance of soft skills in employment. It is also recommended that teachers or academicians will come out with more interactive ways to develop soft skills among students at every stage to make them become more confident with themselves and prevent them from being unemployed in future.

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