

Character development strategies through the soft skills training to students for job readiness

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Abstract

Instilling the character values is realized through a learning process that aims to equip graduates with job readiness and help internalize values for student life on campus and in society. This study aims to investigate the effects of giving soft skills training on student character development. The research respondents consisted of 148 students. This study employed a quantitative approach. Primary data were gathered using a questionnaire. The data validity utilized content validity and item validation with product moment Pearson correlation analysis. Data analysis used paired-sample tests. The results show that there was a significant difference in the student's character before and after obtaining soft skill materials. Student character values are better after being given soft skill training than before getting soft skill training.

Keywords: *Character Development, Graduate Job Readiness, Softs Kill Training*

Introduction

Character development is a process that takes place in human life (Benaziria, & Murdiono, 2019). The character originates from internalized beliefs and habits, which will direct how individual acts in daily life. Parents have a role in character development, including religious, honest, disciplined, tolerance, hard work, creative, independent (Defitrika and Mahmudah, 2021; Irmalia, 2020; Supriyadi 2018). The Ministry of Education and Culture implements the character reinforcement of the nation's successor through the Character Education movement reinforcement (Sukarsono, Chamisijatin, & Susetyorini, 2021). Character development needs to be well planned and managed to achieve its goals (Green and Skinner 2005).

Soft skill is a skill that focuses on the development of character values. As new academic community members on campus, students are trained with soft skills, which broaden their insights related to character values. These values are expected to strengthen hard skills. Soft skills are the highest type of learning that can help and develop intellectuality (Anni, 2007). Character/moral values are important for state life (Tyas, Sunarto, & Naibaho, 2020). The balanced hard skills and soft skills are expected to provide opportunities to form qualified

and highly competitive students in work. The role of character education in the world of work is beneficial to graduates, including building leadership (Brungardt, 2011), promoting business success (Mitchell et al., 2010), and being competitive (Crawford & Dalton, 2012).

The perception toward character is varied as it depends on the habits, customs, and culture developing in the society. Character values in society are general in nature. Differences in culture and educational curriculum models (Boateng et al., 2017) will certainly be a challenge to find the appropriate character-building model. Due to these differences, it is necessary to provide similar perceptions about what to do, including good habits and character behaviours that need to be developed both in campus life and in preparing for the world of work.

Universities also contribute to the student's character building. Character education in universities is expected to encourage students' independence in improving and using their knowledge and studying and internalizing character values to be realized in everyday behaviour (Hasanah, 2013). As an educational university, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY) has a responsibility to strengthen the character of its students. Moreover, UNY generally focuses on producing graduates with character. Leading in character is a tagline of UNY. Also, it is a grand design formulated based on the vision of UNY, religion, Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, Law No. 2 Th. 2003 on the National Education System, and best practices in character education. Character development is realized with best practice through leadership in Educational Institutions (Murray, Berkowitz, and Lerner 2019). Furthermore, these character values will go through a process of instilling and empowering through educational interventions on campus. Habituation strategies that are continuously repeated and cultured will develop character (Sudarti, 2020; Álvarez-García et al., 2015).

Literature Review

The character can be developed through character education. The basic character will be determined by two aspects, namely decisions taken based on ethics and how the situation is being faced. Situations that can define character especially in the workplace are divided into 3: The first type is largely an issue of personal identity. It raises the question, Who am I? The second type concerns groups as well as individuals. It raises the question, Who are we? The third kind involves defining a company's role within society. It raises the question, Who is the company? (Badaracco, J. L., 1998). The above values can be grouped into soft skills.

Higher education prepares students to have hard skills and soft skills because both skills simultaneously affect human resource performance (Arnu, 2019). However, many of them fail when they enter the workplace partly due to low mastery of soft skills. Soft skills are life skills and competencies, including individual (intrapersonal) skills, community (interpersonal) skills, and skills in relation to God (Ida Firdaus, 2017; Muqowim, 2012; Moma, 2015). Soft skills include communication skills, emotional skills, language skills, group skills, ethics and morals, manners, and spiritual skills, which can lead students to adapt to their environment so that they can be more confident and accepted in society or the world of work. These skills can be taught through training (Arnu 2019).

The implementation of soft skills training/education in universities has been running well. However, the graduates' fighting power at work, interpersonal skills, and self-management are still low (Ismail, 2016). Meanwhile, success is determined by approximately 20% with hard skills and 80% with soft skills (Mudlofir, A., 2012; Tarigan, J 2010). Hard skills are acquired from the intensive study in formal education (Satar, M.A.A., 2018). Mastery of soft skills is a necessity, making it easier for a person to socialize in the workplace. Intrapersonal skills are a principle in a career, which is needed in every age and change. Intrapersonal skill is a person's ability to establish a relationship with himself and the skill to manage the self (Ubaedy, 2008). Intrapersonal skills provide ease in controlling behavior, emotions, and ethics when interacting in the workplace.

The Change Leadership Group of Harvard University identifies the survival competencies and skills needed by learners in facing life, work, and citizenship in the 21st century, including critical thinking and problem-solving skills, collaboration and leadership, agility and adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurial spirit, able to communicate effectively both oral and written, able to access and analyze information and have curiosity and imagination (Wagner, 2010). On the other hand, there are nine principles for teaching 21st-century skills:

making learning relevant to the “big picture”, teaching with discipline, developing lower and higher thinking abilities to encourage understanding in different contexts, encouraging learning transfer, learning how ‘learn to learn’ or metacognition, correcting misunderstandings directly, encouraging teamwork, utilizing technology to support learning, and enhancing student creativity (Saavedra and Opfer, 2012)

The US-based Apollo Education Group identified ten skills required by students to work in the 21st century, namely critical thinking skills, communication, leadership, collaboration, adaptability, productivity and accountability, innovation, global citizenship, entrepreneurship skills and spirit, and the ability to access, analyzing, and synthesizing information (Barry M., 2012). The results of OECD research explain three (3) dimensions of learning in the 21st century, namely information, communication, and ethics & social influence (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). In addition, creativity is one of the important components to face a complex world (IBM, 2010).

Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (ATC21S) categorize 21st-century skills related to soft skills into 4 categories: a way of thinking, way of working, tools for working, and skills for living in the world (Care, Griffin, & McGaw, 2012). Way of working includes the skills to communicate, collaborate and work in a team. Tools for working include awareness as a global and local citizen, life and career development, and a sense of personal and social responsibility. Skills for living in the world include information literacy, mastery of new information and communication technologies, and the ability to learn and work through digital social networks. The US-based Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) identifies the four competencies needed in the 21st century with the term “The 4Cs”-communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity.

The character values developed by UNY via soft skill training consist of 9 values: piety, independence, intelligence, discipline, respect and care, cooperation, politeness, tolerance, and democracy. First, piety can be defined as fearing God and feeling his supervision (Mat Saichon, 2017). Second, independence is a person’s ability to realize the desires and needs of his life with his strength (Nasution, T., 2018). Third, intelligence means sharp-minded, quick to understand, smart, clever, learned. Intelligence has an important role in character development (Aryadi Wijaya, 2015). Fourth, discipline is a feeling of obedience to the values that are believed to be his responsibility. Discipline will encourage the growth of other good character values, such as responsibility, honesty, and cooperation (Wuryandani, Maftuh, Sapriya: 2014). Fifth, respect and care refer to an attitude sensitive to the conditions and the surrounding environment (Dodds, 2016). An attitude to better respect everyone, whether younger, peers, or older ones. An attitude of willingness to help and reduce the difficulties of those around him. Sixth, cooperation is an attitude of building solidarity, where activities are carried out together to ease the work or maximize the completion. Seventh, polite refers to behaving well and saying good words. Eighth, tolerance is an act of appreciating and respecting differences. Ninth, democracy refers to accepting each other’s opinion differences. Everyone has the right to express an opinion and realize it.

Character building in teaching learning process was stimulated by teacher presence on schedule, students praying before starting activities in class, inspecting the student neatness and presence, the teacher being a model, the students greeting in the beginning and at the end of the class, implemented the lesson plan containing character values, and professional competences of the teacher to build the student character. (Marini et.al, 2019). Character development is a process through meaningful learning. Teaching in class will be meaningful if the teacher can develop the student character through teaching learning process. Character values can be integrated through classroom interaction, teaching material, cooperative learning, and instructional media used. The teacher creativity in making best learning design is very important in building student character in class (Rahmi M M & Erlinda R.,2014),

Character development strategies can be through others to be more effective. Individual factors, such as strengths use, psychological need satisfaction, goal-setting and goal-striving provides promising leads to explain how strengths interventions work. However, the effect on intervention efficacy of relational or contextual factors, such as intervention environment or facilitator attitude to strengths, has not yet been explored. Implications for interventions in school settings are considered (Quinlan, D., Swain, N., & Vella-Brodrick, D. A., 2012). There are 6 strengths of one’s character: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence; as well

as suggest ways for assessing and developing behavior consistent with virtue and transformational leadership. (Shepherd, D. A., & Suddaby, R., 2016).

In Indonesia, there are 18 values of the character Education, which originate from religion, Pancasila, culture, and national education goals. These values are presented in the learning materials, including: (1) Religion, (2) Honesty, (3) Tolerance, (4) Discipline, (5) Hard work, (6) Creative, (7) Independent (8) Democratic, (9) Curiosity, (10) National Spirit, (11) Patriotism, (12) Achievement Appreciation, (13) Friendliness / Communicative, (14) Love of Peace, (15) The Joy of Reading, (16) Environmental Care, (17) Social Care, and (18) Responsibility (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2011). The Educational Curriculum contains character values that will be realized. The problem sometimes deals with the validity aspect of the assessment. The role of the educator is very important in the implementation of character development (Zulfah & Shofa, 2019).

Students who are given soft skill training will have a better character before being given soft skill training. The hypotheses proposed in this study are:

Ha: Students who are given soft skill training will have a better character before being given soft skill training.

Methods

This research employed a quantitative approach. This research consisted of 148 students, namely the third students who have received soft skill training. The character variables referred to in this study include pious, independent, intelligent, disciplined, respectful and care, cooperative, polite, tolerant, and democratic. The survey data were collected utilizing a questionnaire with a Likert scale. Data validity employed content validity and product-moment correlation techniques. The results of the validity test show that all items in the character measurement instrument are valid. Data analysis utilized paired sample test.

Results & Discussion

Before performing the data analysis, a data normality test is carried out aiming at investigating whether the data distribution in the group of samples belongs to the normal distribution or not. The normality test in this study utilized the Kolmogorov Sminorv normality test with the help of the SPSS Software Program. The error rate used was 5% or 0.05. If the significance value or Asymp value. Sig. 2 tailed is greater than 0.05, then the data is normally distributed. Conversely, if the significance value is less than 0.05, then the data is not normally distributed. Here are the results of the normality test.

Table 1: Normality Test

		pre	pos
N		148	148
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	Mean	180.7905	187.2432
	Std. Deviation	19.25244	18.07529
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.066	.101
	Positive	.044	.039
	Negative	-.066	-.101
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.800	1.231
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.544	.097

Source: The Processed Primary Data, 2020

Based on the table above, the pre-test obtained the value of Asymp Sig. 2 tailed Kolmogorov Sminorv 0.544 > 0.05 and the post-test data Asymp value obtained. Sig. 2 tailed at 0.097 > 0.05. The results show that the

data on pre-test and post-test are normally distributed.

A homogeneity test is used to determine whether the data from the research results in the experimental class and control class have homogeneous values of variance or not. Data is said to have a homogeneous variance value if the level of significance is ≥ 0.05 and if the level of significance is <0.05 . Thus, the data is said not to have the same value of variance (not homogeneous). Here are the results of the homogeneity test in this study.

Table 2. Homogeneity Test

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
.273	1	294	.601

Source: The Processed Primary Data, 2020

Based on the results of the homogeneity test calculation, the significance value is 0.601. The value obtained from the homogeneity test has a significance level of ≥ 0.05 meaning that the data has the same variance value (homogeneous).

Hypothesis testing was performed by testing paired t-test samples with the help of the SPSS software program. Paired samples t-test is two measurements on the same subject of a particular effect or treatment. The error rate was 5% or 0.05. The decision-making guidelines in this paired sample t-test are based on the calculated t value or the probability value of Sig. 2-tailed. When the calculated t value is in the Ho subtraction region and the Sig value. 2 tailed <0.05 , there is a difference between pre-test and post-test results. Conversely, if the value of t count is in the acceptance region Ho with the value of probability or Sig. (2-tailed) > 0.05 , there is no significant difference between pre-test and post-test results. The following is a table of test results of paired samples t-test.

Table 3. Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	pos	187.2432	148	18.07529	1.48578
	pre	180.7905	148	19.25244	1.58254

Source: The Processed Primary Data, 2020

The Paired Samples Statistics table above shows the descriptive values of each variable in the paired sample. Posttest has an average value (mean) of 187.2432. The obtained data distribution (Std. Deviation) is 18.07529 with a standard error of 1.48578. The pretest has a mean value of 180.7905. Data distribution (Std. Deviation) obtained 19.25244 with a standard error of 1.58254. This indicates that the posttest data is higher than the pretest. The distribution range of the final test data is smaller with a lower error standard. The test results are presented in the following table.

Table 4.4. Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences				T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval				
					Mean	of the Difference			
						Lower	Upper		
Pair 1	pos - pre	6.45270	12.89589	1.06004	4.35783	8.54758	6.087	147	.000

Source: The Processed Primary Data, 2020

Based on the table above, the posttest has a mean of 6.45270, the standard deviation of 12.89589, the standard error mean of 1.06004. In addition, t-statistic shows positive (6.087) with sig value. $0.000 < 0.05$ so that it can be concluded that there is a significant increase in character by giving soft skill training to students. Based on the test data, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in students' character before and after obtaining soft skill training.

Discussion

To examine the character differences, some respondents' characters were measured first through pretests before being given soft skill training. After being given treatment in the form of soft skill training, the respondent's character was measured again through a posttest to test the differences in student character before and after obtaining soft skill training. The UNY team carries out the soft skills training for new students. Softskill is developing life skills and competencies for oneself, groups, communities, and God. The nine character values developed by UNY in soft skill training are piety, independence, intelligence, discipline, respect and caring, cooperation, politeness, tolerance, and democracy.

Based on the analysis of pretest and posttest results, there are differences in students' character before and after obtaining soft skill training. In the experimental group, there was a significant difference between pretest and posttest results. The value of the pretest result is 180.7905, and the posttest result increased with a value of 187.2432 and significance <0.05 . Thus, there is an increase in student character. The lowest value on the pretest of 177.6631 increased to 184.3070 on the posttest. The highest value on the pretest of 183.9180 increased to 190.1795 on the posttest. The average value of 180.7905 in the pretest is included in the low category compared to the ideal average value of 184.0169. Meanwhile, the value of 187.2432 on the posttest is included in the high category compared to the ideal average of 184.0169.

The results show that soft skills training can build the student's character. Before getting soft skill training, the student's character has a lower average than after receiving soft skill training. This result supports the opinion that soft skill is a person's skills in relating to others called interpersonal skills and skills in managing oneself called intrapersonal skills to work optimally (Muqowim, 2012; Murray, Berkowitz, and Lerner 2019). Mastery of student's soft skills contributes to job readiness and becomes a necessity because this will make it easier for a person to socialize in the workplace where they can perform all the duties (Álvarez-García, Sureda-Negre, and Comas-Forgas 2015)

Strengthening soft skills is badly needed by students both for dealing with campus life and later in the world of work. Soft skills enable students to adapt to their environment so that they can be more confident and accepted in society or the world of work (Murray, Berkowitz, and Lerner 2019). The soft skills training for UNY students has been proven to develop character values, including piety, independence, intelligence, discipline, respect and care, cooperation, politeness, tolerance, and democracy (Fathinnaufal and Hidayati, 2020).

The nine character values used as indicators in this study increased. Students' piety increases: the students prevent themselves from doing harmful actions that reduce their faith, do not do things that are forbidden by their religion, protect themselves from something that is not in accordance with religious norms, are fear of God, and abandon reprehensible deeds because they are always feeling overseen by God (Mat Saichon, 2017). For the indicator of independence (Nasution, T., 2018), students experience an increase by doing things with mature judgment, do not like to rely on others, maximize self-power to meet life needs, be responsible in doing everything, and prefer to do things work with their ability. The student's indicators of intelligence increase more quickly by responding to the situation/environment, making wise decisions easily, experiencing academic achievement improvement, having the high motivation to learn, and feeling smarter in thinking

Discipline can be trained and developed (Singh, 2019). Through soft skills training, students' disciplined character increases indicated by completing the job/task based on the target, prioritizing punctuality in completing work/task, doing work according to SOP, setting a schedule in completing tasks, and not delaying work. Furthermore, respect and caring also increased after students gained soft skill training. The increase can be viewed from their increased sensitivity to the environment, willingness to help others in need, humility towards older people, not interrupting the conversation when discussing, showing more empathy. The need for character education to help students develop good character includes knowing, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values such as respect, responsibility, honesty, fairness, and compassion (Pala, 2011). Student's cooperative behavior experienced differences after gaining soft skill training indicated by: being able to work in teams or groups, do not feeling forced when work is completed with mutual aid, willing to sacrifice for the common good, do not feeling comfortable when working in groups, feeling difficult to accept other people's opinions. The

polite character of students has improved, indicated with more patient, able to position themselves, speak softly (smooth) and kind, do not feel compelled when starting to greet, respond to the greetings of others/friends with pleasure like to help others sincerely. Tolerant character in students has increased, for instance, not imposing self-will on others, not teasing people around/environment, understanding differences of opinion, doing something with a thought of reward, feeling happy when a friend asks for help. The democratic character of students increases such as showing more respect for other people's opinions, trying to listen to other people's opinions even if they are different from their personal opinions, preferring to make decisions by deliberation, do not liking other people's opposing opinions, and sacrificing personal interests rather than group/ collective interests.

Conclusion

Soft skills training can significantly enhance a student's character. The character of students can be developed and improved in accordance with the intended goal. Character development strategies can be done through Education and learning (Singh, 2019). The cultivation of character values needs to be repeated so that it becomes habits and culture. The soft skills training before the lecture is very meaningful for students because it will guide their behavior and career development. In character development, students obtain values that are meaningful to their lives and become internalized so that they will be a filter when behaving. That character will grow and improve gradually. Thus, it can assist them in job seeking.

This research is limited to soft skill aspects, while there are still other aspects such as demographics and culture that affect the character. Therefore, further research can consider other aspects such as demographics and culture in forming student character. In addition, based on the results of this study, stakeholders, especially universities, need to consider soft skill materials in the curriculum. The soft skills training is expected to prepare the student's character who is ready to deal with the world of work.

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