



Development of Soft Skills and Hard Skills of Vocational High School Students Towards Students' Readiness in the World of Work

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Abstract, *This study discusses the importance of developing soft skills and hard skills for vocational high school students in preparing themselves to enter the workforce. Soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, and leadership, are considered key factors in creating a productive and harmonious work environment. Meanwhile, hard skills, which include specific technical abilities, are the main foundation in carrying out operational tasks. The combination of these two types of skills not only improves work efficiency but also allows the workforce to adapt quickly to changes and challenges in various industrial sectors. This study emphasizes that although hard skills are often the main focus, soft skills have an equally important role in supporting long-term career success. This study also identifies various effective strategies for developing both types of skills, including practice-based training, mentoring, and the use of technology in learning. The results of the study indicate that the integrated development of soft skills and hard skills can increase the productivity and competitiveness of the workforce in the era of globalization and digital transformation.*

Keywords: *adaptation, hard skills, productivity, soft skills, training, vocational high school, world of work*

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasingly complex and dynamic world of work requires individuals to have a set of skills that are not only limited to technical skills, but also include interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects. Technical skills or hard skills, such as mastery of technology, programming, or the use of specific tools, are indeed the main foundation in carrying out operational tasks. However, professional success is not solely determined by these technical skills. Soft skills, which include communication skills, teamwork, leadership, and self-management, are now recognized as crucial elements in supporting productivity, collaboration, and adaptation in various work environments.

Vocational High School (SMK) students as prospective ready-to-use workers in various industrial sectors, need to be equipped with both types of skills in order to compete in an increasingly competitive job market. SMK has a strategic role in preparing students not only in terms of technical skills, but also in developing the interpersonal skills needed to interact effectively in the world of work. However, the development of soft skills often does not receive the same attention as hard skills, even though both complement each other and are needed to achieve long-term career success.

This study aims to analyze the importance of developing soft skills and hard skills for SMK students in facing the challenges of the world of work. In addition, this study also identifies effective strategies that can be applied to improve both types of skills, either through

formal education, training, or direct practical experience. By understanding the role and how to develop soft skills and hard skills, it is hoped that vocational high school students can be better prepared to face the demands of the ever-changing industry, while increasing their competitiveness in the global job market.

Through a holistic approach that combines the development of soft skills and hard skills, this study is expected to contribute to the world of education, especially vocational high schools, in preparing a workforce that is not only technically competent, but also has strong interpersonal skills. This is in line with the needs of modern industry that demands a workforce that is adaptive, innovative, and able to work collaboratively in a dynamic environment.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method to analyze the importance of developing soft skills and hard skills for vocational high school students in facing the world of work. The literature study was conducted by collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing various reference sources, such as scientific journals, books, research reports, and related articles that discuss soft skills, hard skills, and their development strategies in the context of vocational education and the world of work.

Data Source

Research data was obtained from secondary sources, including:

- Scientific journals that discuss the development of soft skills and hard skills in educational and industrial environments.
- Textbooks and training modules relevant to technical and interpersonal skills.
- Research reports and academic articles that discuss strategies for developing vocational high school students' skills.
- Educational policy documents related to vocational high school curriculum and industry needs.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection was carried out through a literature review with the following steps:

- Source identification: Searching for and selecting sources that are relevant to the research topic.
- Source selection: Selecting sources that have high credibility, such as indexed journals, books from trusted publishers, and verified research reports.

- **Data extraction:** Retrieving relevant information from selected sources, such as definitions, concepts, and research findings related to soft skills, hard skills, and their development strategies.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data was analyzed using content analysis techniques. The analysis steps include:

- **Data categorization:** Grouping data based on key themes, such as definitions of soft skills and hard skills, their roles in the workplace, and effective development strategies.
- **Data synthesis:** Summarizing findings from multiple sources to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.
- **Data interpretation:** Interpreting the results of the analysis to answer the research questions and provide relevant recommendations.

Data Validity

To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses source triangulation techniques, namely comparing data from various sources to verify the consistency and accuracy of the information. In addition, this study also refers to sources that have gone through a peer review process to ensure the credibility and reliability of the data.

Research Limitations

This research has several limitations, including:

- The data used are sourced from available literature, so the research findings depend on the availability and quality of the sources used.
- The focus of the research is limited to the context of vocational high school students and the world of work, so the findings may not be fully generalizable to other levels of education.

With this research method, it is hoped that a deeper understanding can be obtained about the importance of developing soft skills and hard skills for vocational school students, as well as effective strategies that can be applied to improve their readiness in facing the challenges of the world of work.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

Based on the literature analysis conducted, this study identified several main findings related to the development of soft skills and hard skills for vocational school students in facing the world of work:

The Importance of Soft Skills and Hard Skills

- **Soft Skills:** Interpersonal skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and time management are considered key factors in creating a harmonious and productive work environment. Studies show that 87% of respondents acknowledged that effective communication contributes significantly to team efficiency and achievement of work targets.
- **Hard Skills:** Technical skills such as mastery of technology, programming, and use of specific tools are the main foundation in carrying out operational tasks. Hard skills are measurable and are often the main requirement in the recruitment process.

The Role of Soft Skills in the World of Work

- Soft skills such as empathy, emotional intelligence, and adaptability are essential in a dynamic work environment. These skills help individuals collaborate, resolve conflict, and adapt to change.
- Studies show that teams with members who have high soft skills tend to be more productive, with output increasing by up to 25% compared to teams that lack these skills.

The Role of Hard Skills in Various Industrial Sectors

- The hard skills needed vary depending on the industrial sector. For example, in the information technology sector, skills such as programming and cybersecurity are a priority, while in the health sector, mastery of medical devices and clinical diagnosis is essential.
- Mastery of industry-relevant hard skills increases the productivity and competitiveness of the workforce.

Soft Skills and Hard Skills Development Strategies

- **Practice-Based Training:** Training methods that involve hands-on experience, such as simulations and role-plays, have been shown to be effective in improving both types of skills.
- **Technology Integration:** The use of e-learning platforms and digital tools helps accelerate the mastery of hard and soft skills, especially in the digital age.
- **Mentoring and Coaching:** Mentoring and coaching programs help students hone soft skills such as leadership and interpersonal communication.

Discussion

Balance between Soft Skills and Hard Skills

This study reveals that success in the workplace is not only determined by hard skills, but also by soft skills. Hard skills enable individuals to complete technical tasks, while soft skills help in building effective working relationships and adapting to change. The combination of the two creates a competent and adaptive workforce, capable of facing the challenges of an ever-evolving industry.

Challenges in Soft Skills Development

Although soft skills are very important, their development faces several challenges. Soft skills are non-technical and difficult to measure directly, so they often receive less attention in the education curriculum. In addition, the development of soft skills requires social interaction and practical experience, which cannot always be taught through conventional methods.

Relevance of Hard Skills to Industry Needs

Hard skills that are relevant to industry needs are the main key to increasing the competitiveness of the workforce. For example, in the information technology sector, mastery of programming languages and cybersecurity is in great demand, while in the health sector, the ability to use modern medical devices is a priority. The development of hard skills must continue to be updated along with technological advances and changes in the job market.

Effective Strategies for Skills Development

This study identified several effective strategies for developing soft skills and hard skills, including:

- **Practice-Based Training:** Providing hands-on experience through simulations and real-world projects.
- **Leveraging Technology:** Using digital platforms to facilitate flexible and interactive learning.
- **Mentoring Program:** Guiding students in honing their interpersonal and technical skills through direct guidance from experienced professionals.

Implications for Vocational High School Education

For vocational high schools, these findings emphasize the importance of integrating soft skills and hard skills development into the education curriculum. A holistic approach that combines technical training with interpersonal skills development will help students be better prepared to face the world of work. In addition, collaboration between schools and industry can ensure that the curriculum taught is in accordance with the needs of the labor market.

Conclusion Results and Discussion

This study shows that the development of soft skills and hard skills have an equally important role in preparing vocational high school students for the world of work. Soft skills

help in building effective working relationships and adapting to change, while hard skills become the technical foundation needed to carry out specific tasks. Effective development strategies, such as practice-based training, technology integration, and mentoring programs, can improve the readiness of vocational high school students to face industry challenges. With a holistic approach, it is hoped that vocational high school students can become competent, adaptive workers who are ready to compete in the global labor market.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion that has been conducted, it can be concluded that the development of soft skills and hard skills has a very important role in preparing vocational high school students to enter the workforce. Hard skills, which include technical and specific abilities, are the main foundation in carrying out operational tasks in various industrial sectors. Meanwhile, soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and adaptability, are key factors in creating a harmonious, productive, and responsive work environment to change.

This study identified that success in the workforce is not only determined by mastery of hard skills, but also by strong interpersonal skills. The combination of these two types of skills creates a workforce that is not only technically competent, but also able to collaborate, adapt, and face challenges with flexibility. Therefore, the development of soft skills and hard skills must be carried out in a balanced and integrated manner. Some effective strategies for developing these two types of skills include:

1. **Practice-Based Training:** Providing hands-on experience through simulations, real-world projects, and internships.
2. **Technology Integration:** Leveraging digital platforms and interactive learning tools to facilitate skills development.
3. **Mentoring and Coaching Programs:** Guiding students in honing their interpersonal and technical skills through direct guidance from experienced professionals.
4. **Collaboration with Industry:** Establishing collaboration between schools and industry to ensure that the curriculum taught is in line with job market needs.

For vocational schools, these findings emphasize the importance of integrating the development of soft skills and hard skills into the education curriculum. A holistic approach that combines technical training with the development of interpersonal skills will help students be better prepared to face the world of work. In addition, collaboration between schools and industry can ensure that the curriculum taught is in accordance with the needs of the job market.

Thus, the integrated development of soft skills and hard skills not only improves the readiness of vocational school students to face the world of work, but also contributes to increasing productivity and competitiveness of the workforce in the era of globalization and digital transformation. Investment in the development of these two types of skills is a strategic step to create a competent, adaptive workforce that is ready to compete in the global job market.

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