

## Pre-Service Teachers' Soft Skills and Achievement

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**Abstract:** This study aims to identify pre-service teachers' skills and achievement. This study was done at Universitas Kristen Indonesia. A total of 94 pre-service teachers' who were in the seventh semester at the faculty of education and teacher training Universitas Kristen Indonesia participated in this study. This study was a quantitative study with survey design. Data were collected using a questionnaire. The results of the study show that the level of soft skills of Pre-service English foreign language Teachers is at an excellent level. The results of the study also show that there is a positive relationship between pre-service teachers' skills and achievement. Besides, the findings also show that there is a significant difference between skills and achievement. In conclusion, the importance of teamwork, willingness to take responsibility and collaborative learning are among the essential aspects for effective learning in this context that teachers need to think. Finally, this study suggests several initiatives that can be done, especially those related to the pre-service teachers' skills and achievement to improve the marketability of graduates.

**Keywords:** Pre-service Teachers, soft skills, achievement

### 1. Introduction

Soft skills talks about the characteristic abilities which is possessed by an individual responding to their environment. Soft skills as qualities needed by workers that are not related to the knowledge technically, for example, the ability of somebody to interact with others and adaptability. "Soft skills are intrapersonal skills such as the ability to self-manage and interpersonal skills, such as how individuals interact with others" [1; 2]. Soft skills are needed in the world of work. This ability can help individuals apply the knowledge gained in tertiary institutions to the world of work. College graduates usually cannot transfer their knowledge to actual work situations. It is because they do not have the soft skills expected by the company, which will allow them to adapt to their work environment. The failure to build cooperation between individuals and to use knowledge is generally not caused by constraints in technical knowledge. Soft skills or soft competencies are "skills that are not visible or better known as the development of necessary attitudes and personality abilities to support the socialization of human life" [3; 4]. Soft competency is divided into three parts, namely about personality, self-concept, mental attitude. The data above is not wrong with high soft skills, of course, the level of ability or competitiveness of this nation will be more advanced.

The main causes of this failure are low interindividual communication skills, as well as the weak ability of individuals to utilize tools and methods to manage their work. All these abilities are called soft skills. Soft skills are social skills to interact with other people and manage their work. Soft skills are "developed from values, principles, and are applied in the form of skills, which include communication skills, negotiation, selling, serving customers, problem-solving, and others" [5; 6]. Soft skills are a means of applying hard skills, namely technical expertise and knowledge of theoretical concepts. Soft skills cannot replace hard skills. However, soft skills will empower them so that they can be applied optimally. What is meant by "soft skills" only refers to those who are called skilled are the people we need to do something technically. When we need them, or when they need each other than, of course, they have to connect through communication, giving opinions, listening to others, discussing, building teamwork, solving problems, or contributing ideas to meetings, and contributing something for conflict resolution. It is not surprising that leaders at all levels of an organization often rely on people who have the ability and skills to carry out specific tasks. The leader's job is "to provide motivation, provide living and role models, build work teams, facilitate meetings, encourage innovations, receive input to solve problems, make decisions, make plans, delegate authority, give instructions, and foster employees" [7; 8].

In addition to teaching skills, all the duties of the leader are also to build certain work behaviours that should be arranged in a program. "Soft skills are general skills that can be used in many jobs and not specific to one job or industry only from low to the high level" [9; 10]. Soft skills are subjective. An instrument has been produced using one of the aspects of the measurement, namely "the assessment of lecturers which contains nine constructs of skills, namely teamwork skills, communication, leadership, critical thinking and problem solving, learning lifelong and information management, entrepreneurship, ethics, moral and professional, social and management" [11; 12]. Its level of "mastery of skills will determine a person's ability and capability in problem-solving, report

writing, group work, learning new knowledge and managing stress when they need to handle a change successfully” [13]. Among school administrators, these soft skills are also essential to be practised in school management. The principals in High-Performance Schools more often practice collaboration and teamwork skills according to teachers' perceptions. It is followed by communication skills, presentation skills, leadership skills, planning and management skills, self-efficacy self-mastery, and humanitarian and coaching development.

On the other hand, a component of skills that lack capacity is initiative skills. Teachers' perceptions of the soft skills level leadership practice of principals are found to be high, either as a whole or in each component concerning the mean range between 4.00 to 4.48. Soft skills are “characteristic abilities that individuals have in responding to their environment. Soft skills as qualities needed by workers that are not related to technical knowledge, for example, the ability to interact with others and adaptability” [14]. Soft skills are “intrapersonal skills such as the ability to self-manage and interpersonal skills, such as how individuals interact with others. Soft skills are needed in the world of work”. This ability can help individuals apply the knowledge gained in tertiary institutions to the world of work. College graduates usually cannot transfer their knowledge to actual work situations. It is because they do not have the soft skills expected by the company, which will allow them to adapt to their work environment [15]. Pre-service English foreign language teachers with academic knowledge require equipment with soft skills to be initiative and to be able to master new knowledge according to what is needed in their workplace by the ever-evolving world of education. The “application of soft skills among prospective teachers should be implemented directly through the development of a specially designed curriculum or indirectly through the existing curriculum at the university” [16]. It means that English Education of *Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan Universitas Kristen Indonesia* (EED - FKIP - UKI) graduates can also be able to compete in the “ever-changing job market” [17]. “Soft skills will ensure that an individual remains relevant and competitive in a challenging and globalized era. Soft skills are also beneficial for university graduates who match the set of soft skills needed in the world of work, as one of their teaching practices in building skills to be ready to enter the world of work or in other words to meet the needs of the market is getting a job” [18; 19]. The “issue of graduates lacking soft skills has become a global issue at this point and soft skills are much needed in various training institutions and employment sectors” [20]. It is to ensure that “graduates from each institution have technical skills and can face any challenges in the workplace” [21].

It is, therefore, “the responsibility of the education sector to take proactive action in this issue because soft skills can be taught and practised during the teaching and learning process” [22]. “Primary education starting at the preschool level will be the best starting point to cultivate these soft skills, although teachers will find it quite difficult to make children understand and practice them” [23]. Children spend more times outdoors every day. However, “parents should also be given the same responsibility to ensure that their children are equipped with these skills” [24]. The “majority of employers around the world know that most applicants lack soft skills, it is difficult to get employees who can master soft skills well” [25]. The latest trend is that “most employers like to focus more on soft skills than the knowledge they gain from a piece of the degree certificate” [26]. They further emphasize that “soft skills such as communication skills, teamwork skills and problem-solving skills” [27]. Accordingly, “most employers place high expectations on educational institutions to focus on the development of soft skills among their students” [28]. On the other hand, “students also hope to be systematically trained with the knowledge and skills needed in the industry to increase their marketability in work” [29]. However, a disease that focuses only on learning to obtain a certificate alone has hampered this effort. If the education authorities take no firm action, this will further slow down the humanitarian process through education.

Learning outcomes are abilities that children get after going through learning activities. Students who succeed in learning are those who succeed in achieving learning goals or instructional goals. Learning outcomes are “the level of mastery achieved by students in participating in teaching and learning programs, by the objectives set” [30; 31]. Learning outcomes are “a process to see the extent to which students can master learning after participating in the teaching and learning process or the success achieved by a student after participating in learning activities marked by numbers, letters, or certain symbols agreed upon by the education provider” [32; 33]. From some of the above theories regarding the understanding of learning outcomes, the “learning outcomes referred to in this study are learning outcomes (changes in behaviour: cognitive, affective and psychomotor) after completing the learning process with information search learning strategies and recitation methods as evidenced by evaluation results, in the form of value” [34].

Learning outcomes are “changes in a person's behaviour which include cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities after following a certain teaching and learning process” [35; 36; 37]. “Education and teaching are said to be successful if the changes seen in students are the result of the teaching and learning process they experience, namely the processes they undergo through programs and activities designed and implemented by the teacher in the teaching process” [38; 39]. It can be seen that the “ability and development as well as the level of success of education” [40]. Learning outcomes must show changes in circumstances for the better so that it is useful for: a)

increasing knowledge, b) understanding more about something that has not been understood before, c) developing more skills, d) having a new view of something, e) appreciating something more than before. It can be concluded that the term learning outcomes is a change from students so that there are changes in terms of knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

This study was conducted to identify the level of soft skills and achievement of the Pre-service English foreign language teachers at the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training *Universitas Kristen Indonesia*. This study will provide information to the relevant parties to enhance the development of soft skills among students in the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training. This paper also aims to examine the soft skills level of Pre-service English foreign language Teachers and the extent to which it can help improve academic achievement compared to the previous semester. Researchers are confident that this study will be able to provide information and contribute new knowledge related to soft skills and their influence in terms of demographic factors, namely gender and race.

## 2. Method

This study uses a survey method design. The design of this study was chosen because it fits the purpose of the study to identify trends in attitudes, opinions, behaviours or characteristics [41; 42]. This study is a cross-sectional study as it attempts to measure the soft skills of 94 seventh semester students who were taking Teaching Practice Program at School (Pre-service English foreign language Teachers) at Faculty of Education and Teacher Training *Universitas Kristen Indonesia*. The instrument used in this study was a set of the questionnaire consisted of 24 statements, it was adopted, and the score of the reliability value is 93, and this means that this questionnaire is suitable for use for this study. This instrument uses a five-point Likert scale consisting of five options that represent students' condition, on each item designed to determine the level of soft skills based on the self-reflection of the study sample. Data analysis was conducted to answer the research questions, namely descriptive statistics using mean values, i.e. average values representing a set of observed values and inference statistics using Pearson correlation, t-test and ANOVA.

## 3. Result And Discussion

The findings of the study are discussed in this session, the discussion is based on four research questions, namely the level of soft skills among Pre-service English foreign language teachers, the relationship between soft skills and academic achievement, differences in the level of soft skills based on gender and differences in the level of soft skills based on race. The findings of previous studies are also used as support in discussing the findings of this study. Besides, tables are also included and can be referenced to clarify the findings of the study further.

The findings of the study show that the mean of soft skills from the respondents is 4.31 which is considered to be in the high category from 4.00 - 5.00. It illustrates that the teaching and learning training modules or curriculum practised at EED - FKIP - UKI have successfully met the construction of soft skills such as communication skills, group work skills, problem-solving skills, lifelong learning, ethics and morals, entrepreneurial skills and leadership skills. Those constructs are applied during teaching-learning both inside and outside the classroom. Besides they are also applied during continuous assessment carried out following the practice at EED - FKIP - UKI. It indicates that the level of soft skills of Pre-service English foreign language Teachers is at a high level because the mean score is 4.31. It illustrates that the teaching and learning process practised in EED - FKIP - UKI as a whole has successfully contributed to the achievement of high soft skills both directly and indirectly. "Co-curricular activities that are required for all Pre-service English foreign language teachers to be a medium for the application of soft skills" [43; 44]. Teaching practice program that they have to go through each semester that is at least a week to 12 weeks and internship in the final semester to complement these soft skills. These activities that have been planned and practised are intended to equip Pre-service English foreign language Teachers to become the country's human capital, as stated in the National Education Philosophy. It also explains why EED - FKIP - UKIs play an essential role in ensuring that soft skills are nurtured among Pre-service English foreign language Teachers. It is in line with a study which stated that the "level of mastery of these skills would determine a person's ability and capability in problem-solving, report writing, working in groups, learning new knowledge and managing stress when they need to handle a change successfully" [45].

The correlation analysis shows that "there is a relationship between soft skills and academic achievement of Pre-service English foreign language Teachers". The  $r(93) = 0.574$ ,  $p = 0.008$  ( $p > 0.05$ ). It indicates that there is a positive relationship between soft skills and academic achievement of Pre-service English foreign language Teachers. Therefore, Pre-service English foreign language Teachers who have high soft skills will help them achieve high achievement also in their learning at EED - FKIP - UKI and vice versa. The results of this study also found that "there is a positive relationship between soft skills and academic achievement among Pre-service English foreign language teachers". Improved academic achievement (GPA score) means that Pre-service English foreign language teachers will also have high soft skills. The results of a similar study in research which showed that "academic achievement has a positive relationship related to soft skills that are from the aspects of critical

thinking, problem-solving and communication” [46]. The understanding gained through teaching and learning will allow students to realize what is gained and collected in the classroom is applied in real life. Teachers who teach will realize that with a good understanding of students, they will appreciate the teaching of teachers by showing the right attitude. These findings show that soft skills that need to be understood mean that students need to learn, and teachers need to teach well and meaningfully. The skills “required here are good cognitive ability and critical thinking. Soft skills studied, for example, critical thinking and problem solving require high-level thinking”. It also reflects the importance of Pre-service English foreign language teachers to be exposed to high-level thinking skills to be critical and able to solve problems. School is a very challenging place, and Pre-service English foreign language teachers need to be prepared for anything that becomes uncertain. Therefore, one way to deal with this situation is to ensure that soft skills can be nurtured from the beginning of their academic year. Thus, a disease that only focuses on learning to obtain a certificate only and has hampered this effort before can be changed. If the education authorities take no firm action, this will further slow down the humanitarian process through education. Difference between Soft Skills Levels based on Gender - Table 3 is an analysis of the differences in soft skills levels based on gender. T-tests conducted showed that there was a significant difference based on gender among Pre-service English foreign language Teachers,  $t(103) = 33.340$ ,  $p = .000$  ( $p > 0.05$ ). It shows that among male and female Pre-service English foreign language Teachers, they have different levels of soft skills even though they have gone through the same training modules and curriculum. The difference in The Level of Soft Skills Based on Nation - Table 4 is an analysis of the differences in the level of soft skills based on race. The findings show that there is no significant difference in the level of soft skills of Pre-service English foreign language Teachers based on race,  $F(34,616) = 0.726$  and  $p = 0.612$  ( $p > 0.05$ ). It means that all Pre-service English foreign language teachers regardless of race, have successfully acquired soft skills applied through training modules and curriculum practised at EED - FKIP - UKI. The study also found that there was no significant difference between softskill and racial skills, and so is based on gender. The teaching and learning policies and systems at EED - FKIP - UKI do not limit the involvement of students in terms of the race where all Pre-service English foreign language Teachers have to follow the same module either directly or indirectly.

However, in terms of gender, the attitude and commitment shown by more positive female Pre-service English foreign language Teachers have shown that there are significant differences in the level of soft skills based on gender. Therefore, EED - FKIP - UKI has successfully provided Pre-service English foreign language Teachers with much needed soft skills, especially when they enter the world of work. However, more specific assessments and studies can be conducted to identify which components of soft skills contribute or need improvement so that soft skills among these Pre-service English foreign language Teachers can be further strengthened. It means that regardless of gender or race, these soft skills need to be achieved to the highest level because all Pre-service English foreign language teachers bear the same responsibilities. It is in line with a study which stated that “educators need to recognize, face and deal with life skills or crisis with soft skills needed for happiness and student success to increase productivity and success in society” [47]. The role of teacher or educator has become essential and complex to ensure that the demands and requirements for these soft skills can be met.

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