

## **BUILDING STUDENTS' SOFT SKILLS THROUGH HIDDEN CURRICULUM**

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In higher education institutions in Indonesia, both hard skills and soft skills are given to the students to produce qualified graduates that can be accepted in the work market. Hard skills can be defined as technical skills, whereas soft skills are non-technical skills that include the intra-personality and inter-personality. Soft skills can be defined as emotional intelligence quotient that characterize our relationship with ourselves as well as with others. These skills consist of such traits as discipline, honesty, communicative, friendliness, leadership, creativity, ability to work in team, etc. For student teachers, soft skills are significant since those student teachers will one day become teachers. And teachers are ones trusted by government and societies to educate the young generation. This means that they are demanded to have good soft skills. In English Education Department of Muria Kudus University, soft skills are given for student teachers in the form of hidden curriculum. This study aims at revealing the soft skills achieved by student teachers in English Education Department of Muria Kudus University. The method of the study was qualitative and the data were collected using questionnaire. The result indicates that the hidden curriculum applied builds the soft skills of the student teachers.

**Key words: soft skill, hidden curriculum**

### **A.BACKGROUND**

In higher education institutions in Indonesia, both hard skills and soft skills are given to the students to produce qualified graduates that can be accepted in the work market. Hard skills can be defined as technical skills, whereas soft skills are non-technical skills that include the intra-personality and inter-personality. Coates (2009) explains that intra-personality is the skills to adjust oneself like time management, stress management, creative thinking, and fast learning. Inter-personality includes the skills to interact with other people in society and workplace like motivating ability, communicating ability, leadership quality, and negotiating ability.

The role of soft skills in higher education are as important as hard skills. However, in the world of work, soft skills seem to have more important role. It is revealed by the National Association of Colleges and Employers of America in 2002 concluding that in the work market, the users require graduates with 82% soft skills capability and only 18% hard skills. This means that the development of soft skills of the students are necessary so that after they graduate, they can not only be absorbed on the work market, but also live with others well.

That's why soft skills are significant for students regardless their field of study. For student teachers, soft skills are even more significant since those student teachers will one day become teachers. And teachers are ones trusted by the societies and government to educate

young generation. They will be model for their students; therefore they must show good soft skills.

Unfortunately, soft skills hardly ever catches attention in curriculum. Mostly, curriculum covers only hardskills that students must achieve. As Wiles and Bondi (1993) note, curriculum is merely defined the course of study dealing only with hard skills. Sometimes, soft skills might appear in the lecturers' discussion, but do not really get serious thought. The lecturers usually treat their students' soft skills as invisible matters since the curriculum says nothing about them. In the competence-based curriculum, soft skills get adequate portion as well as hard skills. They are acknowledged and brought to consciousness in lecturers' mind. Therefore, lecturers do effort as well to build their students' soft skills. This is done through the so-called hidden curriculum.

Giroux (1983) defines hidden curriculum as those unstated norms, values, and beliefs embedded in and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom. This is in line with Wiles and Bondi (1993) that mention hidden curriculum as unplanned curriculum. Myles et al. (2004) cover broader area for definition of hidden curriculum, that is the unwritten culture of schools.

The English Education Department of Muria Kudus University has applied the competence-based curriculum since 2007. The competence-based curriculum puts the student-centered learning as its main approach. Attard (2010) explains that student-centered learning is an approach that varies according to the type of students involved in the learning process and the type of environment in which such learning takes place among other things.

Through the student-centered learning approach in its curriculum, the soft skills are integrated in the teaching learning process as hidden curriculum. The lecturers design the teaching learning process in the classroom that enables the soft skills to be achieved by student teachers. As Haggman and Almekinders et al. (2003) state, the classroom is an ideal learning ground, where one can practice alternative ways of dealing with people. This is done through the students' activities, for example group work discussion, presentation, doing project based learning, and so on.

This study aims at revealing the soft skills achieved by student teachers in English Education Department of Muria Kudus University. Archna (2009) identifies seven soft skills implemented in all institutions of higher learning: communicative skill, critical thinking and problem solving, and team work, life-long learning and information management, entrepreneur, ethisc, moral and professionalism, and leadership. Among those seven soft skills, this study only focused on three soft skills, namely communicative skill, critical thinking and problem solving skill, and team work skill. Communicative skill involves effective communication in different contexts and with different people. Meanwhile, critical thinking and problem solving skill are the skills that organize, interpret, formulate, and analyze data, information, questions, ability, and issues that confront communities. The team work skill includes the ability to work with people from different social cultural background to achieve a common goal.

## **B. Methodology**

This study belongs to qualitative research method. The data were collected using questionnaires given to 70 students of the 6th semester of the English Education Department of Muria Kudus University. The questionnaires include close-ended questions on three soft skills to be studied, ie. communicative skill, critical thinking and problem solving skill, and team work skill. The questionnaires require the answer of 'yes' or 'no' from the respondents whether they have experienced and achieved the soft skills mentioned. Those data were then analysed qualitatively.

### C. Findings and Discussion

The data analysis indicates that more than half of the student teachers at the English Education Department of Muria Kudus University achieve the three soft skills (communicative skill, critical thinking and problem solving skill, and team work skill). It is shown in the following table:

Table 1. The Soft Skill Achieved by the Student Teachers

NO	SOFT SKILL	Yes Answer	No Answer
1	Communicative Skill	59.9%	40.1%
2	Critical Thinking and Problem Solving Skill	57.3%	42.7%
3	Team Work Skill	85.7%	14.3%

The Table 1 above reveals that the soft skills of communicative skill, critical thinking and problem solving skill, and team work skill are developed by the student teachers through the teaching learning process designed by the lecturers. In communicative skill, 59.9% of the student teachers admitted that they achieved communicative skill like ability to deliver idea clearly, to present spoken and written idea confidently, to participate in presentation and do presentation well, and to give feedback on presentation. From those communicative skills, the ability to deliver idea clearly is the highest to be achieved by the student teachers.

Meanwhile, 57.3% student teachers achieve the critical thinking and problem solving skill. This skill includes ability to think critically on the problem related on their subject and ability to give solution to the problem related with their subject. The student teacher mentioned that their ability to think critically on the problem related on their subject is better than their ability to give solution to the problem related with their subject.

The team work skill developed by the student teachers constitutes 85.7%. The student teachers told that they achieve such abilities as ability to build a good relationship with others, ability to work effectively with others, ability to understand and play the role of group discussion coordinator, ability to give active contribution in team work, and ability to respect other's opinion. Among those abilities in team work skill, ability to build a good relationship with others seem to be the highest to be achieved by the student teachers.

From those three soft skills of communicative skill, critical thinking and problem solving skill, and team work skill, it can be seen that team work is the the most soft skill developed by the student teachers. Meanwhile, communicative skill is the second soft skill mostly achieved by the students. The least soft skill to be acquired by the student teachers is critical thinking and problem solving skill.

The achievement of those soft skills do not occur through the lecturers telling the student teachers to have so; however, it is resulted from the activities designed by the lecturers during the teaching learning process. Those activities designed use the student-centered learning approach that enable the student teachers to be active and take part actively in the process of teaching and learning.

The student-centered learning approach is the main approach coloring the competence-based curriculum applied by the English Education Department of Muria Kudus University. This

curriculum puts the soft skills and hard skills the students must achieve balancedly. They place the same significant role and get the same vital attention. If the hard skills are part of the formal and open curriculum, the soft skills are included in hidden curriculum. This means that soft skills actually exist but are not stated directly in the teaching learning plan; instead, they are designed in the process of teaching learning in the class.

#### D. Conclusion

This study concludes that the hidden curriculum applied at the English Education Department of Muria Kudus University can build the student teachers' soft skills. Those soft skills achieved include communicative skill, critical thinking and problem solving skill, and team work skill. The team work skill is the highest skill developed by the student teachers.

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