

# THE ROOT OF SOFT SKILLS: SHIFTING THE PARADIGM ON SUCCESS

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## Abstract

*The research itself was approached through a multi-case study within the qualitative method. The main instrument in qualitative method was a researcher himself which collected the data from three activities such as interview, observation as well as documentation study. The result of this study has shown that soft skills are a crucial aspect for enhancing individual performance. Although, in formal education found that academics or hard skills have become main priority in school and formal education institutions. Thence, most efforts in education best practices always pay attention to the hard skills rather than soft skills. In fact, some researches shown that soft skills are important and crucial aspect to be improved in order to increase the understanding of hard skills or technical matters. Despite of the national education policy admitted indirectly that soft skills are a priority but in field and practices not all stakeholders such as teacher and school principals implement the best program to improve soft skills instead of hard skills.*

**Keywords:** Soft skills, Hard skills, Paradigm on Success.

## A. Introduction

It is long time enough psychology experts possessed certain paradigm that the intelligence is based on cognitive side. Moreover, some of them conducted further study on multiple intelligences instead of the only single intelligent as mentioned above. One kind of the multiple intelligences is emotional intelligence that can make individual to have greater opportunity for success performance within his job and/or activities.

Studies of Emotional Intelligent (EI) initially appeared in academic articles in the beginning of 1990s and the term EI is defined as the ability

to perceive and to express emotion, to assimilate emotion in thought, to understand and reason with emotion, and to regulate emotion in the self and others. The academic concepts have been developed over several theoretical articles based on a growing body of relevant research (Mayer, 1990).

David Wechsler formulated intelligence as global capacity, rational thinking and can be effectively interaction with environment. He mentioned there are two elements of intelligence; intellectual and non-intellectual (social, personal factors and affection). In 1943, Wechsler said that non-intellectual element more importance for predicting capability of individual work performance. Wechsler is not the only expert who found the importance of non-intellectual aspect, there were Robert Thorndike and Howard Gardner who described interpersonal and personal intelligences as significant aspects along with intellectual element to be considered for human improvement (Wechsler, 1958).

Leadership study of Hemphill and Ohio, USA, found that mutual trust, respect, warmth and rapport are important aspects for an effective leadership. Leader who can create such aspects within the group members will enhance effectiveness of his/her leadership. The similar research were also happen at AT&T Telecommunication that social and emotional competences like communication, sensitivity, initiative, and interpersonal skills are needed for employees in achieving highest performance (Musnandar, 2014).

Between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Soft Skills (SS) are related, because EI is the "engine" or machine of a car called SS. The machine has always maintained to make the car run well. Someone who has a great academic and technical ability won't be a star performer without SS mastery (Sternberg, 2000).

In a development perspective, a person's EI can be enhanced if supported by conducive environment. There will be a way to create an emotionally intelligent organization, either in a classroom or workplace. The following conditions should be taking place prior to conducting a training program, such as avoiding authoritarian behavior in an organization, encouraging an open climate and trustworthiness among

members. Besides, enhancing empathetic skills and understanding others, appreciate people achievement and getting good relationships with each other. Whenever, we are able to maintain the above conditions well then, the EI quality improvement will be a necessity thing.

To grow-develop EI can be done in various ways including, through training or learning, an internship (at work) as well as democratic atmosphere. If the concept of emotional competence as a critical success factors can be well accepted by those who have authority to make decision, consequently a number of practical activities should be looked over. Based on this world view, numerous tests including National Examination (UN, *Ujian Nasional*) in schools and employee tests in the company (workplace) need to be rearranged either on types of tests or success criteria. The tests should not only give large portions for the measurement of cognitive thinking skills (intellectual ability), but also need to prepare a measuring tool to determine the level of person's EI. In addition, teaching in schools and universities must also fully pay attention on how to grow-develop EI along with such SS (Musnandar, 2013). Our paradigm should be changed with the exploration of emotional intelligence, which is then sharpened by Daniel Goleman in emotional competence, which is believed to be the determinant of the success of individual performance improvements. Here we describe a model of emotional intelligence as a reference for the development of learning skills. The model of EI: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and managing the relationship of this model can be read with a cycle as this self-consciousness or self-awareness is a necessary basis for growth in SS like self-confidence of individuals (Musnandar, 2016). The introduction of the consciousness of itself can generate social awareness of self-management and good behavior. Both seems necessary to improve SS such as self-control and adjustment, initiative, customer service oriented (can also be in social perspective) and empathy. Finally, self-management and social awareness are important factors for interaction with others.

If all things on the-grow-develop of SS are running as expected in schools and formal education institution. Thus, the character education program does not necessary need to be made. Because the development of

SS in schools could build students' character and the nation character accordingly.

The main focus of this study is about the low level performance of students' soft skills in Indonesia which have been delineated in the beginning of this writing. Meanwhile, the quality of education results as the aims of national educational is clearly mentioned as stipulated in Chapter 3 of National Education System Law No. 20/2003 that is to nurture students' potential to have faith in God, to develop good character, to live healthy life and to be knowledgeable, creative, self-reliant, responsible and democratic citizens. Based on context and focus of the research, an overarching question and three sub-questions guide this inquiry. The primary question asks: How is soft skills education managed in schools and how responsive is schools' management to the nature of soft skills. This general question is elaborated into three sub-question such as: *First*, what is the concept and theory of soft skills in education and workforce sectors? *Second*, how do we manage students' soft skills in schools? *Third*, why do soft skills becoming important to change paradigm on success?

## **B. Soft Skills Concept Based on Emotional Intelligence**

### **a. *The Progress Research on Emotional Intelligence***

Salovey & Mayer (1990) described Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action. They developed measurement tools for EI. In their research discovered that group with high EI will be easy to deal with others to build good social networking. In 1990s the work of Salovey and Mayer inspired Goleman to write best seller book titled: "Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ". Afterward, it is continued with his second book entitled "Working with Emotional Intelligence" (Goleman, 1995).

IQ is not good predictor for job performance, even though our ordinary people still do not know about it. Amongst related researches on IQ only Hunter and Hunter (1984) who give higher percentage that is 25%

for IQ as success factor on work performance. Other researches like Stenberg mentioned about 10% the realistic percentage for IQ on such success. Even in other research the role of IQ only below 5%. On the other hand EI will contribute more than 80% of individual success on job performance (Goleman, 1995).

Research has shown that the cognitive ability and non-cognitive ability are linked each other. In one study some kids who gathered in a room and are given marshmallow ask for waiting. They are informed that if they wait until researcher comes they will get one more marshmallow. Ten years later researcher found reality that those kids who patience for getting one marshmallow were having (210 point) higher score of SAT (Scholar Aptitude Test) rather than those who did not patience to wait. This shows us the correlation between cognitive (SAT score) and non-cognitive (patience) aspects. Patience and ability to handle emotion are reflecting the level of emotional intelligence (non-cognitive) and can improve SAT score (cognitive side) of person (Mayer, 1990).

***b. EI Value at the Workplace***

Ability to manage emotion and overcome with stress is parts of emotional intelligence which found important factors for success. A study at the workplace that involved store managers of a retail network company showed the ability to manage emotions and overcome with stress can increase sales, profit and goods investment value. More than 80% of the success of an employee, to be a top performer, is attributed to Emotional Intelligence (EI), while the remaining less than 20% comes from IQ factor. The manager who can handle his emotion and overcome with stress can impact positively to his employees' performance (Goleman, 1998).

EI is related with ability of person in determining the right time to express emotion and manage it properly. For instance in an experiment at Yale University USA some volunteers took roles as manager in a team that assigned to allocate bonus for their subordinates. Among managers there was one manager who has been trained on how to express EI when interact with subordinates such warmth, respect and building rapport. The result was such trained manager can influence team members become

solid and good teamwork and can distribute bonus fairly. Finally, the team work performance become higher.

Empathy is also valued in EI person, an expert, Rosenthal and his colleagues found that someone who recognizes other emotion by performing empathy behavior would get success at workplace and his social activity. Then, Goleman stated emotional competence can lead and direct personal skills and social skills which support directly to job performance at workplace (Musnandar, 2016; Goleman, 1995).

Emotional competence as known as soft skills and need to develop-grow inside of Indonesian people. We realize, there are still many people do not have good character in their day-to-day life. This thing is due to our concentration is still much on academic or hard skills only. Meanwhile soft skills as important factor toward individual success has long enough ignored by all of us or as neglected factors.

The character education which has currently became national discourses should be based on the-develop-grow of students; soft skills. EI is all about knowing how and why people feel and take advantage to achieve positive results. Awhile, SS is a manifestation of controlled, balanced, positive and well managed emotions. It is no doubt that there is a significant relationship between EI and SS.

### *c. Soft Skills Nature or Characteristics*

Soft skills (SS) definitions may vary, but it is mostly related to personal attributes that enable someone to interact effectively and harmoniously with others. The characteristic of SS comprises a cluster of personality traits, social graces, personal habit, friendliness, and optimism which individuals acquire as they grow and mature. Other soft skills are active listening, negotiating, conflict resolution, critical thinking, ethics and leadership skills (Musnandar, 2013).

It is possible that an employee can be a star performer by using SS. We find many people are proud of their intellectual capacity even though we can see much research that shows the importance of soft skills as a measure of success. Therefore, it is right for us especially those who have authority in education world to pay more attention on how to develop

Indonesian students of their emotional intelligence and/or soft skills (Burbach, 2006).

To enhance the capacity of Indonesians' soft skills, we must shift our education, which focuses on the intellectual domain. This shift to soft skills can also be applied to the market. Recruitment departments at workplaces should be provided with techniques on how to identify these skills in potential employees or job seekers. It is time to review our education policy that only focuses on intellectuality as the main aspect to be developed. We need curriculum which gives greater opportunity for improving soft skills.

In a long period there has not strong scientifically evidence yet that soft skills can create employees' job performance within Business and Industry sectors. The research results conducted by Goleman (1995, 1998, 2000) have generated theory on emotional intelligence (EI) upon the individual successful performance. The concept of EI will be embodied in the form of emotional competence that is "engine" for the development of soft skills training programs. One's ability of soft skills is, for instance, to interact with others in the workplace will be realized in the form of effective cooperation (teamwork).

Goleman (1999) mentioned that the success of someone's performance is determined by SS rather than hard skills: such as academic or functional skills or technical skills that puts stress on intellectual aspects. Meanwhile, SS can be found in the form of one's initiative, creativity, communication and motivation as well as problem solving and decision making. SS mastery mostly can be seen from someone's ability to handle tasks or assignments that contain three elements. The power of appearance is the first element for instance always do initiatives, strong-will to do the best (achievement drive), and easy to interact with its environment (adaptability). The second element is the power of influence; someone who has this element will be able to influence others and lead people (leadership) and strong power to complete the tasks (political awareness). The last element is the power of empathy. Someone who has empathy will have strong self-confidence and willing to share knowledge, skills and attitude to other (developing others) (Waggoner, 2006).

The stronger such three elements are possessed intact by the person, the greater portion of success performance in the work environment. In contrast, less control of SS arises from the following behaviors: when facing problems requiring flexibility and versatility in action that cannot be accommodated very well, even rigid impressed (stiffness). People who lack of SS always less serious with minimum contribution (low conscientiousness), for example when shop attendant does not care and lazy to serve customer. The next figure is behaviors which always break promises, indiscipline and less trusted (low trustworthiness). The last behavior is less capable when interacting with others wisely and properly (poor social skills). The underlying concept of SS is always associated with a particular theory of emotional intelligence developed by Goleman, who later elaborated of such emotional competence. Various findings in the workplace on emotional competence could enrich the understanding of SS development concept.

### **C. The Importance of Soft Skills to Reach Success in Education**

Education process leads students to develop human potentials such as intellectual and non-intellectual intelligences. Qualified teachers will certainly show their effort to strengthen students' cognitive as well as affective and psychomotor aspects. Therefore, a smart student is not only in cognitive but also emotional and social aspects by showing good performance.

Soft Skills (SS) is not only communication skills (verbal and nonverbal) with others, but also the ability to present itself as the maximum that can be "transmitted" to colleagues, and given a positive impression on others which interact with its work. Even the power of SS could certainly be extended not only beneficial to the business world, but also for the life of the community, nation and state, including in managing the wheels of government. Thus it is understood that a variety of jobs that relate to other people really need the involvement of SS (Joni, 2005; Caudron, 2006).

Unfortunately, students' SS are not being improved in appropriate ways. The principal and teachers seem very busy in pursuing their



academic targets as indicated in their effort for National Examination (UN, *Ujian Nasional*). This examination focuses on the cognitive aspect. Meanwhile, the affective and/or emotional aspects of students are not effectively measured by such written examination. UN is not a proper tool to evaluate students' learning achievements because it is not a test that fits for all. It mostly measures the cognitive aspect of human intellects.

In fact, there are various intelligences called Multiple Intelligences (MI) belong to human beings. Therefore, students' learning achievements should be assessed according to a comprehensive measurement by creating the portfolio performance evaluation. It seems that government regulation, school curriculum, teaching-learning process and examination are dedicated tightly for academic achievement (hard skills) in the intellectual aspect, which is usually represented by IQ, while emotional and other MI are neglected.

Long enough, psychology experts believe certain paradigm that intelligence is based on the cognitive domain. Afterwards, MI were found in some research and studies. They showed that an Emotional Intelligence (EI), as one of MI, has become a major factor in determining individual success in the household, workplace and school.

People who do not have good character can make discomfort and social problem. Bad behaviors of students in public sphere such as bullying, juvenile delinquency, street brawl and vandalism are caused of their *qalb marīḍ* (the heart is sick). This is due to the fact that many schools prefer to develop students' intellectual skills rather than students' soft skills which have been long enough ignored by educationists (Musnandar, 2016).

The character education program should be based on the development of students' soft skills in order to have the best results. Students' EI, character and SS are interrelated each other. Soft and hard skills are needed across the subjects delivered by teacher. SS affect the quality of hard skills.

According to Berkowitz as restated by Megawangi, the habits to perform good deeds do not always ensure that someone will be valuing character, for instance a person who behaves honestly because of afraid of

getting penalty or punishment. In this case, the person does not value morality. Therefore, character education should fully involve emotional aspect for doing good deeds (Megawangi, 2010; Dina, 2011).

Wrong teaching approach of school teachers may create failure in achieving the predetermined educational objectives. Several findings have proved this statement:

*First*, there are many inappropriate practices in schools that affect undesirable quality of the students' personality.

*Second*, the creativity score of five to seven years old children, who experience inappropriate education system, will be decreasing up to 90%. Afterward, if the education system does not support a creativity development, the score will keep going low until they reach the age of forty with only about 2% of children's creativity level, which is full of imagination.

*Third*, the contemporarily brain research has been shown in this period of time. It is important to build children's fundamental character to love learning at eight".

The Law of National Education System which is known as *Undang-Undang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional* (UU SPN) constitutes a collection of all norms, values, traditions and culture of the nation derived from the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD 45). UUD 45 is a general and top guidance for Indonesian people and those who govern the country. The country founding fathers had wisely set up all basics of human life as a nation and plural society including education. The Law number 20 of 2003 must not be deviated from UUD 45. Similarly, the Government Regulation and/or the Minister Regulation derived from such Law must be in line to each other.

If a policy does not comply with the guidance, then such policy (regulation) is "null and void". It means that it cannot be implemented. However, not all people are able to make the same perception in understanding UU SPN since its statements in the chapter and article are open for a variety of interpretations despite some parts of the statements are very clear, concise and easy to understand as delineated. However, stakeholders who have authority to make and implement the policy and

regulation often overlook the education gaps due to the lack of understanding and misleading on the education theory and concept into practices.

#### **D. Concluding Remarks**

Based on the research context, the data description, the discussion of findings, it can be explained research results as follows:

*First*, The Indonesian student soft skills are still in an unfavorable quality, based on: a) Student character is the main issue in education due to reprehensible phenomena, unexpected behavior is shown frequently in public sphere; b) Unfortunately, soft skills are not properly considered in the existing school's curriculum. The school and/or education stakeholders more focus on the hard skills or intellectual and academic achievements only, rather than soft skills competences; c) In fact, students' academic achievements and students' soft skills non-academic aspect performance have not shown promising results, yet; d) In reference to the research result that soft skills may affect the hard skills quality significantly. Hence, students' soft skills will enable and enhance their academic achievement.

*Second*, The soft skills development programs will bridge the gaps in social life, through: a) The teacher and principal should have the right perception and understanding on soft skills concept that can enhance the students' academic achievements; b) Special soft skills development programs for teachers and principal on SS are also important to be held in schools; c) The transmission methods for soft skills development programs can be upheld through formal and/or hidden curriculum. Meanwhile, the hidden curriculum is a side effect of a teaching and learning activity as well as a broader and implicit concept. In hidden curriculum soft skills are not designed specifically into subjects.

The suggestions for future works are: *First*, The National Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (MONE and MORA) need to intensify and develop soft skills program through some planned activities both inside and outside the classroom. The policy makers should put soft skills

as the main focus in developing student character as stipulated in the Law of National Education System, number 20 of 2003. *Second*, Schools should determine strict regulation on the assessment of their teachers' soft skills before they are allowed to deliver subjects. They must attend soft skills development programs.

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