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Soft Skills and Work Ethics of Language Program Graduates

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Abstract— Graduates of vocational schools and polytechnics are expected to become skilled workers who are ready to work in various fields of work. Especially for graduates from language study programs, having the language skills and competence certificate is not enough to face the competition in the world of work. They also need to always perform soft skills and work ethics, to be able to get ready for working, to be able to understand colleagues better, and thus to adapt fast in any environment. Thus, there have been issues toward to what extent formal education specifically embeds soft skills and work ethics, what aspects of soft skills and work ethics that employees must possess, and what efforts have been given to develop them. This study aims at describing the efforts done by Language Study Programs, Sekolah Vokasi, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) to adopt soft skills and work ethics and describing the performance of Language Study Programs, Sekolah Vokasi, UGM graduates in the aspects of soft skills (intrapersonal skill, interpersonal skill, and communication) and work ethics (commitment, integrity, professionalism, and hard work). The data were obtained by conducting observation and interview to the head of Language Study Programs and also administering a self-evaluation questionnaire, containing 47 items of soft skills and 44 work ethics items with five performance indicators (1: never – 5: always), that was distributed to 160 graduates from English, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese Language Study Programs of Sekolah Vokasi UGM. The finding of study suggests that efforts done are soft skills training session (in student orientation), etiquette lesson, support in organization participation, and internship program. The mean score of each indicator in the questionnaire is between 3.62 – 4.65 (out of 5). This score shows that the Language Study Programs graduates often and usually perform soft skills and work ethics that benefit them in the labor market.

Keywords—soft skills; work ethics; workplace

I. INTRODUCTION

In order to win the competition in a labor market, high education graduates must meet the requirements requested. Potential candidates will occupy particular positions offered if they are employable. This employability can be associated with readiness for working [1]. Work-readiness becomes very essential in the labor market.

Work-readiness is a prominent advantage gaining from vocational school or polytechnic education. The education puts more practice than the theory, thus graduates of vocational schools or polytechnics are supposed to be ready for work. They are expected to be skillful workers in their fields of work.

The expected skills from the candidates in the recruitment or selection process are both soft skills and hard skills. They refer to competences that are task-oriented and competences that are emotional-based respectively [2]. In line with that, [3] specifically defines hard skills as “those vocational skills and abilities without which the vocational tasks cannot be carried out successfully or can be carried out less successfully” and soft skills as “those skills and abilities which are beyond the vocational skills”. These skills are equally important. Commonly, employers expect candidates perform both skills strongly even though the soft skills support or complement the hard skills [4], [5]. In the previous research, [5] state that there is a significant correlation, i.e. the soft skills have 25.3% effect on the hard skills.

Besides, the employees have to perform work ethics in their job. Mostly, they comprehend the principles of ethics in their work field, but then sometimes are not able to put them into practices [6]. In fact, employees also have soft skills in certain degree, but not every employee is able to use them intentionally [2]. As consequence, they need training to develop both their soft skills and work ethics.

Graduates of Language Study Programs, Sekolah Vokasi, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) work in some places; like in government institutions, schools, foreign companies, private enterprises, and their self-employed business. They may share similar cultural background to the one in a workplace; others however, may have completely different background. One's background may influence one's characters, personal traits, and thus may also have a significant impact on work ethics and soft skills. Work ethics and soft skills, though, can be developed and trained, to help shape one's characters and personalities.

Graduates need to always perform soft skills and work ethics, to be able to get ready for working, to be able to understand colleagues better, and to adapt fast in any environment. Therefore, language teaching needs to pay attention to embed soft skills and work ethics in their education. Language Study Programs, Sekolah Vokasi, UGM as formal education institutions inculcate some efforts through some strategies to develop soft skills and work ethics in their education. The goal of those strategies is that the graduates of the Language Programs possess soft skills and work ethics and, which is more important, always put them into practice in their workplace. Accordingly, this study aims at, first, describing the efforts done by Language Study Programs, Sekolah Vokasi, UGM to internalize soft skills and work ethics. Second, it is to describe the performance of the graduates of Language Study Programs, Sekolah Vokasi, UGM in those two aspects.

II. METHODOLOGY

To be able to answer the first research question, empirical studies were conducted through some observations and interviews with heads of Language Study Programs at Sekolah Vokasi, UGM. Then, to meet the second objective, a questionnaire in *Google Form* was administered to 160 respondents in July 2018. They are the graduates of English, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese Language Study Programs of Sekolah Vokasi UGM. The questionnaire is a self-evaluation, using an instrument designed by [7]. In designing the instrument to measure the performance of soft skills and work ethics, [7] reviewed some related theories and previous studies and also conducted empirical studies through some observations and semi-structured qualitative interviews with heads of HR managers, stakeholders, and psychologists in

some industries and universities. Focused group discussion and Delphi technique were done afterwards to check the validity and reliability.

The instrument contains two aspects: soft skills and work ethics. The first aspect is divided into three sub aspects, i.e. intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, and communication skills. Then, those sub aspects are described into 13 indicators with 47 question items. Next, in the aspect of work ethics, there are four sub aspects. They are commitment, integrity, professionalism, and hard work. Those four sub aspects are also defined into 13 indicators, which are put into detail in 44 questions items. The question items are close ended with five performance indicators that range from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

The data obtained from the observation and interview were in the form of descriptive qualitative data. They were classified based on the types of the activities conducted in the Language Study Programs, Sekolah Vokasi, UGM which were used to answer the first research question. Meanwhile, the data gained from administering the questionnaire were quantitative. Descriptive statistics in *SPSS Statistics 25* was employed to process the data.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data reveal some facts about the effort to carry out soft skills and work ethics and the result of those process from self-evaluation of the graduates.

A. Strategies in Developing Soft Skills and Work Ethics

Language Study Programs, Sekolah Vokasi, UGM have some strategies in developing soft skills and work ethics. The first is soft skills training session in annual orientation for freshmen, called *Pelatihan Pembelajaran Sukses bagi Mahasiswa Baru (PPSMB)* [8]. In that session, the students are trained how to communicate or interact with teachers, friends, school attendants, and anyone both directly and in social media politely and to behave based on social norm and law. The next is etiquette class. This class is commonly conducted in the first year, either first or second semester. It aims at developing their personality as well as preparing them for job seeking and also ethics and etiquette in the workplace. Encouraging the students to be actively joining organization both in campus and outside the campus (in community) is another effort done. It is by facilitating them financially, providing the infrastructure needed, and showing appreciation to the students involved. They may train all the sub aspects of soft skills and work ethics here.

The other strategy is conducting internship program. Students who are in semester 6 are usually able to take internship program in any institution, based on their interest

or based on the study program recommendation. It is done at least 2 months, commonly 2 – 6 months. They will also receive an assessment from their supervisor related to their competence in integrity, field of work mastery (professionalism), communication skills, team work, self-development, discipline, loyalty, and also their English communication skills as well as information and communication technology (ICT) use [9]. Through this program, the students are able to do participatory observation and real practice related to the soft skills and work ethics they have learned in advance in the other programs above mentioned. They may experience the challenges in performing those two aspects needed in their real job later.

B. Graduates Performance

Soft skills and work ethics performance of the graduates of English, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese Language Study Programs are presented in Table 1. It presents the aspects of the performance (soft skills and work ethics), sub aspects, indicators, the mean score of each sub aspect and indicator. The value of the mean score may range from 1: never to 5: always, hence 2 can be interpreted as sometimes, 3 means often, and 4 means usually.

TABLE I
LANGUAGE PROGRAM GRADUATES PERFORMANCE

Aspect	Sub Aspect	Indicator	Mean (Sub Aspect)	Mean (Indicator)
Soft Skills	Intrapersonal Skill	Able to realize the emotional turmoil experienced	3.91	3.92
		Able to manage yourself		3.98
		Able to empathize		3.86
	Interpersonal Skill	Demonstrate non-verbal attitudes and behaviors that are in accordance with social norms	4.12	3.95
		Able to adapt to the surrounding environment		3.95

Work Ethics	Communication Skill	Willing to help and facilitate others	3.99	4.15
		Able to cooperate in teams		4.30
		Able to focus on listening		3.85
		Respond appropriately and politely		4.13
		Actively start a communication process, based on the idea owned		3.86
		Able to accept criticism		3.91
	Able to appreciate and give praise to others	4.09		
	Willing to apologize	4.49		
	Commitment	Strong desire to serve and be loyal to the company (membership focus)	4.10	3.81
				Focus on Performance, to provide the best for the company (performance focus)
Focus on targets, and diligently complete the tasks and responsibilities thoroughly and beyond the target (Goal		4.18		

		Commitment)		4.18
		Willing to accept greater responsibility, in accordance with company policy changes (Commitment to Organizational Change)		
Integrity		Firmly adhere to work principle	4.46	4.26
		Uphold the truth in accordance with the code of ethics		4.46
		Anti-corruption		4.65
Professionalism		Mastering the field of work	4.32	4.05
		Providing excellent service		4.41
		Responsible for work		4.47
Hard work		Eager to work in any condition	3.83	3.80
		Able to make priorities		3.62
		Time Discipline		3.98

Table 1 suggests that the mean scores of the respondent responses for intrapersonal, interpersonal, and communication skill are 3.91, 4.12, and 3.99 respectively. Those scores imply that the language program graduates often and usually perform soft skills in their workplace. From the intrapersonal skill, the prominent skill is self-regulation ability (3.98). This skill can help the graduates to choose the words and actions that are necessary and appropriate to do or to calm themselves when they are emotional. Moreover, ability to cooperate in teams is an

outstanding skill possessed by the graduates, which is indicated by the score of 4.30. This interpersonal skill supports the graduates to always consider group decision/agreement, to ensure distribution of information on work progress within the group, and to share the responsibility. In addition, related to their ability to communicate, the willingness to apologize (4.49) is most obvious skill among other soft skills they perform. They are eager to admit their mistakes without hesitation. On the other hand, they need more training to focus on listening (3.85) when they are communicating. They should have more practice to listen in order to obtain and retain information without performing any interruption.

In addition to the soft skills, the Language Program graduates demonstrate corresponding work ethics performances. They range from 3.83 for their hard work to 4.46 for their integrity. Commitment and professionalism are in between. The graduates often and usually perform commitment to their job with their performance focus (4.35). They provide their best for the company. In line with that, they are responsible for work (4.47) in order to be professional. Furthermore, anti-corruption, that reaches the score of 4.65, becomes their extraordinary skill they always perform in their job. The score describes that they have strong moral principles that always lead them to act honestly. Integrity is number one for them. In contrast, their ability to make priorities (3.62) need extra boost due to the improvement in their hard work skill.

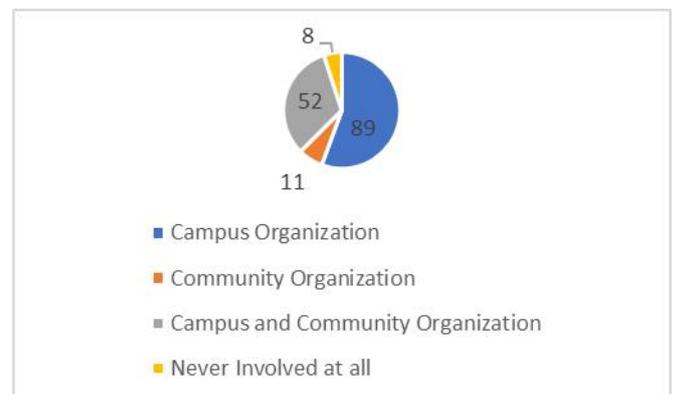


Fig. 1 Involvement in organization when in high education

Besides, another fact is revealed from the questionnaire, i.e. the involvement of the graduates in the activity or organization both in the campus and in the community when attending high education, as described in Fig. 1. The figure displays that more than half of the respondents joined activities or organization in campus, such as extracurricular activities (*Unit Kegiatan Mahasiswa/UKM*), Student

Executive Board (*Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa/ BEM*), and Students Association (*Himpunan Mahasiswa*). Eleven respondents state that they were involved in an organization in their community. Moreover, 52 respondents admit that they took part in both campus and community organization. Meanwhile, 5% of the respondents did not involve themselves in any organization at all. Seeing that 95% of the graduates were actively participated in the campus and community organization during their study in 2010-2018, there must be a positive correlation between that involvement and their performance in the workplace.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Some strategies done by Language Study Programs at Sekolah Vokasi, UGM to develop the students' soft skills and work ethics are soft skills session in freshmen orientation, etiquette class, involvement in organization both in campus and community, and internship program. In the meantime, the Language Programs Graduates often and usually perform soft skills and work ethics in their job. The lowest value of the soft skills indicator is 3.85 (ability to focus on listening) and the highest is 4.49 (willingness to apologize). The lowest mean for work ethics possessed by the graduates is in ability to make priorities (3.62) and the highest is in anti-corruption deed, which is 4.65. The lowest and highest score of the work ethics becomes the need-to-be-improved and the need-to-be-maintained skills of the overall graduates' performance to win the labor market.

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