

## IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF STUDENT SOFT SKILLS THROUGH INTERNSHIPS TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF EDUCATED UNEMPLOYED

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### ABSTRACT

Internships are training activities or courses carried out by students to improve their soft skills competencies. Internship conducted by students can not only provide benefits to students who take part internship program, but with internship activities students can also improve their soft skills competency. This is a qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. Data collection was carried out using semi-structured interviews with students who had completed internships in private companies and government institutions. The research results show that internship activities carried out by students are a good means to improve their soft skills competencies, especially in terms of behavior, communication, critical thinking skills, ability to work in teams, desire to continue learning, service and entrepreneurship skills, ethics and leadership. The success of interns in improving the quality of their soft skills also depends on their willingness to continue learning from experience and from the mistakes they make. If students can improve their soft skill competencies optimally, then this can help reduce educational unemployment.

*Key Words: Soft skills, internship, educated unemployed*

### INTRODUCTION

High levels of educated unemployment or unemployment with higher education are one of the characteristics of unemployment in Indonesia. In this case, educated unemployment is the ratio of the number of job seekers who have a high school/K Diploma to Bachelor's education level to the number of workers. The rise and fall of the unemployment rate will be influenced by various factors such as economic growth. Economic growth is the ability of an economy to produce goods or services over a period of time to increase the prosperity of society. Economic growth describes the increase in GDP and is used to measure the current state of the economy. GDP at constant prices is used as a measure of economic growth for regional coverage (Nurlina, et al, 2023).

Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) for August 2023, the unemployment rate in Indonesia is 7.8% in 2023. Unemployment in Indonesia is currently dominated by young people, reaching 42.62%. Most came from the 15-19 year age group, namely 25.7%, followed by the 20-24 year age group, namely 16.85%. Vocational school graduates contributed 9.31%, high school graduates 8.15%, secondary education 17.46%. It turns out that the vocational school that we hoped would soon enter the job market, apparently there has still not been a link and match. Higher education, both universities and diplomas are also contributors to our unemployment. University 5.11%, diploma 4.97% (BPS, 2023).

According to Sumarsono (2009), stable economic growth and the level of community prosperity are the main goals of development. In its implementation, this goal is difficult to realize because there is a problem, namely unemployment, especially educated unemployment. Educated unemployment causes the level of social welfare to decline. Educated unemployment can reduce

the level of government revenue from taxes due to economic activity caused by unemployment. Educated unemployment can cause a reduction in skills because skills can improve if they are always sharpened (Mankiw, 2003).

Apart from wages, the human development index is another factor that can influence educated unemployment in Indonesia. Economic growth theory emphasizes the role of government in developing human resources and human productivity. It is hoped that investing in education will increase the knowledge and skills of the workforce and improve their quality. A person's knowledge and skills will grow along with increasing human quality which will increase productivity at work. Companies that employ someone who has high productivity will receive good results, so that high labor absorption will reduce the unemployment rate (Todaro, 2000).

Many researchers have discussed the causes of educated unemployment from an external perspective, including economic growth and regional conditions, or inflexible company wage policies. However, the causes of educated unemployment must also be viewed from the perspective of human resources, namely abilities in hard skills and soft skills. When someone mentions hard skills, they usually refer to skills as defined by the Random House Dictionary (in Robles, 2012), namely abilities that come from knowledge, practical ability, or intelligence to do something well, competence in doing something, expertise or skills that requires certain training. Meanwhile, the scope of soft skills is broader. Skills related to personality, communication, motivation, habits, discipline, and optimistic relationships with other people, for example interpersonal skills, social skills, emotional skills, and presentation skills. Then consider problem solving skills, team building skills, negotiation skills, etc. (Bawge and Uttam, 2017).

Soft skills are behavioral competencies or emotional and social intelligence with the aim of adapting to the world of work and society. Soft skills are also part of an individual's character so that they can achieve success in all areas of their life. La France (2016) in (Suhardjono, 2022) defines soft skills as intrapersonal and interpersonal behavior that can develop and maximize a person's performance.

**Table 1**  
**Soft Skills Components**

Intrapersonal Skills	Interpersonal Skills
Critical Thinking	Communicative
Creative Thinking	Teamwork
Initiative	Collaborative
Etiquette	Motivating
Willingness to learn	Good Leadership
Commitment	Negotiation skills
High Motivation	Relationship
High Spirit	Good Team Building
etc.	etc

Source: Suharjono (2022:4)

Soft skills greatly influence a person's success, because simply having hard skills is not enough in the world of work. Hartiti (2013) stated that 400 people or 10% of the 4000 people who lost their jobs were due to technical incompetence, meaning that 90% of those who lost their jobs were due to personality problems.

Students' low soft skills can be seen when they take part in internships. The gap occurs because campuses generally only require students to be competent in hard skills, such as high

grades or GPA, skilled in the program they are studying, but do not have competency in soft skills for work, while the industrial world itself is more concerned with soft skills. The internship program is expected to bridge the gap between higher education and the world of work. However, it turns out that what was expected did not work as it should. The many complaints from companies regarding the lack of quality of students' soft skills at the start of their internship shows the urgency for universities and the industrial world to provide the best possible training not only in hard skills but also soft skills.

This research is aimed at answering the question of how universities and DUDI play a role in developing students' soft skills competencies during internships in order to reduce the number of educated unemployed.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Understanding Soft Skills

Aribowo in Illah Sailah (2008:17) states that soft skills are a person's skills in relating to other people (including himself). Soft skill attributes, thus include espoused values, motivation, behavior, habits, character and attitudes. This soft skill attribute is possessed by each person to varying degrees, influenced by habits of thinking, saying, acting and behaving. However, this attribute can change if the person concerned wants to change it by practicing getting used to new things.

According to Iyo Mulyono (2011:99) soft skills are a complement to hard skills. This type of skill is part of a person's intellectual intelligence and is often used as a requirement for obtaining certain positions or jobs. Elfindri, et al (2011:67) stated that soft skills are skills and life skills, whether for oneself, in a group, or in society as well as with the Creator. By having soft skills, a person's presence will be increasingly felt in society. Communication skills, emotional skills, language skills, group skills, morals and ethics, and spiritual skills.

Soft skills are very much needed in the world of work. This ability can help individuals apply the knowledge gained in college to the world of work. According to Suyanto (2012) college graduates usually do not have the ability to transfer their knowledge to actual work situations. This is because they do not have the soft skills that companies expect that enable them to adapt to the work environment.

According to Sharma (2009) in Wahyuningsih (2017:10) soft skill elements include the following: (1). Communicative skills (2). Critical thinking and problem solving skills (3). Team work (4). Life-long learning and information management (5). Entrepreneurship skills (6). Ethics, morals and professional (7). Leadership skills. O'Brien in his book *Making College Count*, Soft Skills can be categorized into 7 (seven) areas called Winning Characteristics, namely: (1). Communication skills (2). Organizational skills (3). Leadership (4). Logic (5). Effort (6). Group skills (7). Ethics.

Table 2.  
Abilities required by the world of work according to their interests

No	Abilities/Skills	Interest Score
1.	Communication skills	4.69
2.	Honesty/Integrity	4.59
3.	Teamwork	4.54
4.	Interpersonal Communication	4.50

5.	Etiquette	4.46
6.	Motivation/Initiative	4.42
7.	Ability to adapt	4.41
8.	Analytical Skills	4.36
9.	Computer Skills	4.21
10.	Organizational Skills	4.05
11.	Detail Oriented	4.00
12.	Leadership	3.97
13.	Self Confidence	3.95
14.	Friendly	3.85

Source : Survey of NACE USA (2002)

Puilam (2008) states that the skills most sought after by employers are communication skills, integrity/honesty, interpersonal skills, motivation/initiative, strong work ethics, working in a team, computer skills, analytical, flexibility/adaptability, and detail oriented. The need for soft skills is also reinforced by the results of a survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) in 2002 in the United States. Peter Vogt then grouped the survey results into 10 abilities or skills that employers asked for from job seekers.

### **Educated Unemployment**

According to Mankiw (2000), educated unemployment is someone who is looking for work or has not yet worked but has a high school education or above. Educated unemployed people are usually from the upper middle class, which allows for guaranteed survival even though they are unemployed. In line with the view above, the concept of educated unemployment according to BPS (2013), namely the population in the age group 18-24 years and the highest level of education completed is at least a high school, either a general high school or a vocational high school.

Educated unemployment is the number of job seekers with a high school education or above divided by the workforce with a high school education or above or someone with a high school education or above who is working, looking for or setting up a business or not working because they are not yet able (not because they are disabled) or who already have a job but have not yet started working (BPS , 2019). The following is the number of educated unemployed according to diploma & university graduates in Indonesia.

According to Azhar Putera Kurniawan (2013), in his research, educated unemployment falls into the category of frictional unemployment because unemployment for educated workers only occurs as long as graduates experience a waiting period. Problems arise in terms of education when unemployment is dominated by workers who have education.

According to the Central Statistics Agency (2012), educated unemployment is the ratio of the number of job seekers with a high school education or above (as an educated group) to the size of the workforce in that group. It can also be called educated unemployment, namely unemployment from high school, diploma and bachelor's degrees. According to Putri (2019), educated unemployment occurs due to a lack of alignment between educational development planning and employment development. Apart from mastering knowledge, graduates who are ready to work should need additional skills outside of academics. These educated unemployed people have quite high standards in choosing a job, such as choosing a job that has many facilities, getting a position, and earning a large salary.

Meanwhile, Sumarsono (in Putri, 2019) states that the educated unemployed are the workforce who have secondary and upper secondary education, namely SMA/SMK, Diploma and Bachelor degrees who are not working. The factors that cause an educated workforce are the economic crisis, an unbalanced employment structure, the need for the number and type of educated workforce, an unbalanced supply of educated workforce, and the number of the workforce being greater than employment opportunities.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This is qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. According to Littlejohn (in Hasbiansyah, 2008) phenomenology is the study of knowledge based on human consciousness. In phenomenology, a person can learn how to understand an event, symptom, or object by experiencing it consciously. Meanwhile, according to Creswell (2010), the phenomenological approach is used to develop understanding or explain the meaning of an event experienced by a person or group.

Researchers chose to use a phenomenological approach because phenomenology is the study of experience and how a person forms meaning from their experiences, which emerges in consciousness (Hadi, et al, 2021: 23). From the concept above, the phenomenological approach was then chosen as a way for researchers to reveal how the experiences of students who take part in internships can develop their soft skills competencies so that they are of higher quality and after graduating they are better prepared to face the world of work and will not become educated unemployed. According to Suyanto (2019), the phenomenological approach concentrates on personal experience, including the part of individuals who share their experiences with each other.

The data collection technique was carried out using in-depth interviews with 10 students who had completed internships, consisting of 5 internship students in private companies and 5 internship students in government agencies. To maintain the validity of the data, researchers triangulated sources by interviewing an internship supervisor at a private company and someone from a government agency. This is done to explore their experience in guiding and supervising students in their place. The identification technique in this research uses a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a method of identifying samples that uses methods that have objectives that are tailored to the objectives of a research (Sugiyono, 2013).

In carrying out the data analysis process, researchers used stages as stated by Moustakas (1994), namely: a) Horizonization. At this stage it is done by describing individual experiences. Interview transcripts were carried out to obtain more textural data. Transcripts function to find out about the understanding/experience experienced by informants (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). b) Textural Description. The textural description process is by means of students telling about the experiences they have gained while participating in the internship program. c) Structural Description.

The process of describing the experience at this stage can be seen based on the setting, which includes the time (when) and place (where) the experience took place. At this stage, researchers conduct an analysis of how soft skill development can occur while students are taking part in an internship program. d) Description of the meaning of the phenomenon. This final stage is a process of combining structural description and textural description. In this process, researchers explain what experiences students gain after participating in an internship for several months at a company or government agency. What difficulties were encountered at the start of the internship and how then based on their experiences, students experienced this phenomenon so that they could understand what soft skills actually meant (Creswell, 2014: 268-269).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, researchers used soft skills elements as stated by Sharma (in Wahyuningsih, 2017:10). Soft skills elements include the following: (1). Communicative skills (2). Critical thinking and problem solving skills (3). Team work (4). Life-long learning and information management (5). Entrepreneurship skills (6). Ethics, morals and professional (7). Leadership skills.

Communicative skills include intrapersonal and interpersonal communication. The elements of intrapersonal communication include: self-confidence, persistence, openness to change and new ideas, ability to control emotions, time management, and self-discipline. Meanwhile, the elements of interpersonal communication are: verbal and nonverbal communication, self-awareness, sensitivity. empathy, conflict resolution, ability to adapt to new environments.

The following are the results of researchers' interviews with students who have implemented internships.

Table 3  
Results of researchers' interviews with intern participants

No	Soft Skills Elements	Internship Participants in Private Companies	Internship Participants in Government Agencies
1.	Communicative Skills (Intrapersonal & Interpersonal Skills/ Oral and Written)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. At the start of the internship, I still had difficulty communicating, still having difficulty communicating with guests/customers.</li> <li>b. With guidance from the supervisor, the informant's communication skills improved, and he was able to use verbal and non-verbal language appropriately.</li> <li>c. Supervisors always provide input and guidance regarding communication.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Communication skills at the start of the internship were still stiff.</li> <li>b. Communication skills change if the supervisor provides guidance or input.</li> <li>c. Supervisors generally provide guidance or input regarding communication ethics, although some rarely do this.</li> </ul>
2.	Critical Thinking & Problem Solving Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. When you first started joining the internship program, you didn't have critical thinking and problem solving skills.</li> <li>b. With guidance from the supervisor, the changes are very noticeable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Critical thinking and problem solving abilities at the start of the internship were not optimal.</li> <li>b. If you get a supervisor who is always willing to guide you, changes to your critical thinking abilities and problem solving skills can be better.</li> </ul>
3.	Team Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Still find it difficult to work together in a team at the start of the internship period</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. It is very rare to be asked to work in a group</li> </ul>

		b. With guidance from supervisors and mentors, over time they get used to working in groups.	b. When completing the internship, the ability to work in a group is not yet visible
4.	Life Long Learning & Information Management	There are significant changes related to the desire to continue learning.	Lack of guidance from mentors to continuously evaluate themselves and their work
5.	Entrepreneurship Skills (Innovation, Networking, Managerial Skills, adaptability, service excellence)	Mentors provide a lot of guidance, especially in service excellence and managerial skills.	Service excellence , adaptability, managerial skills have never been coached by mentors and supervisors. Mentors think that those elements are the responsibility of schools or universities.
6.	Ethics, Moral & Professional	From the start, interns have been given guidance regarding how to work professionally and must have integrity.	Aspects related to ethics and morals are rarely provided by mentors or supervisors.
7.	Leadership Skills (Integrity, courage, compassion, resilience, learning agility, decision making skills)	Mentors and supervisors provide guidance to be able to work agilely, not be slow, and make smart decisions	Aspects related to fast, agile, responsive ways of working are very rarely or almost never provided by mentors.

## Discussion

From the interview data above, it is known that students who get internship opportunities in private companies on average receive better guidance and direction from their mentors or supervisors. If they make a mistake or receive a complaint from a guest or customer, the mentor always provides direction so that the apprentice does not repeat the mistake again. Problems generally occur in the early days of internships, because students are still just entering the real world of work and are trying to adapt to a new environment. However, the coaching provided effectively by mentors allows apprentices to improve the quality of their work. This will determine his competence and professionalism when he graduates as a graduate. Even if the intern can show good performance, the company often offers him a permanent job, and he doesn't need to bother applying for another job. In this way, mentors who can provide good guidance to apprentices will have a positive impact because it will be a step in personal and career development (Ivancevich & Hoon, 2002: 198), which will prevent unemployment.

However, on the other hand, of the 5 interns at government offices, all of them said that they were only given a briefing on the first day of the internship, and were immediately sent to work. Briefings are only limited to work procedures. Intern participants also said that they were rarely or never given guidance. If a mistake is made, the mentor mostly immediately 'takes over' the work and completes it himself, and does not provide direction or guidance to the apprentice so that he or she understands and does not repeat the mistake. Especially things related to motivation, discipline, friendliness, and ways of communicating are almost never conveyed by mentors. This is actually detrimental to apprentices, because they are unable to evaluate themselves. Thus, the results of the internship for approximately 4 months were not optimal. In fact, in this internship activity, the role of mentors in improving the quality of students' soft skills

is highly expected and interns should be able to establish a good relationship with their mentors (Kaswan, 2012: 13).

From the analysis it is also known that the role of mentors or supervisors is very important for improving the work soft skills of students who take part in internships. Students who during their internship get a good mentor or supervisor, who always provides guidance and motivation, will be successful in carrying out their internship well. What is meant by 'good' is that the intern is able to improve his/her quality (soft skills) so that he or she has strong provisions to later enter the real world of work, because the current phenomenon is that many fresh graduates refuse to be offered work outside the city, especially in an area quite far from big cities. Fresh graduates are also generally reluctant to be offered a job with take home pay which they think is too low. They should think about enriching their experience first and improving their quality, especially in terms of soft skills. If they are competent in their soft skills, then they will not become educated unemployed.

## CONCLUSION

The research results show that internship activities carried out by students are a good means to improve their soft skills competencies, especially in terms of behavior, communication, critical thinking skills, ability to work in teams, desire to continue learning, service and entrepreneurship skills, ethics and leadership. However, it all depends on the mentor or supervisor and also the interns themselves. If students get a supervisor or mentor who always provides guidance and is diligent in motivating them, always provides direction not only on work issues but also on matters of attitude, personality, friendliness, serving nature and matters related to soft skills, the results will be good. Students will gain valuable knowledge when they enter the world of work. However, if students get mentors who rarely guide them, or only tell them about problems related to work procedures, students will not be able to improve their soft skills optimally. The success of interns in improving the quality of their soft skills also depends on their willingness to continue learning from experience and from the mistakes they make. If students can improve their soft skill competencies optimally, then this can help reduce educational unemployment. For further research, researchers suggest that research be carried out regarding soft skills guidance models that can be applied during internships.

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