

Facilitating Soft Skills Development of Higher Education Graduate Through Alumni Involvement

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ABSTRACT

A university is primarily being a facility to produce a capable and professional workforce. On other hand, higher education institutions must be reacted quickly to the social and economic needs of the industry. Thus, this leads to their actions to enhance graduate employability. In particular, a good learning model was identified as a central requirement to meet future labour demands. One important element in making graduates with good soft skills is through the involvement of the alumni, who has plunged into the working world. Alumni have a variety of experiences that can be input for improving the university graduates. This study is development research arranging the alumni learning model to empower higher education graduates. By using the ADDIE model stages, this study expands a soft skill learning model that was given directly by university alumni. Based on the results of validity the alumni learning model gets a 93.33% score, while the field test gets a 95% score. These results indicate that the model is valid to be used as a soft skill learning model. On the other hand, the results of the open-ended questionnaire show a positive response from an expert as a validator and student as a user.

Keywords: *University, Graduates, Soft skills, Alumni Engagement, Learning Model*

1. INTRODUCTION

Current graduates face an increasingly competitive job market, meanwhile, at the same time employers from all areas of business search for alumni who are 'job-ready' (Spanjaard, et. al., 2018). The ideal university graduates would have the capacity to integrate across skills (hard and soft skills). They must be creative, critical thinkers, team workers, and having responsibility for their own development. They would also have excellent communication skills.

The availability of professional workforce becomes a challenge for higher education institutions. In this case, Teng, at. al. (2019) stated that "Graduate Skill Gap" is a topic widely discussed in academic field, which is related to how universities are able to prepare graduates who are ready to enter the world of work. There are many changes have happened in workplace environment, increased in employees' education, as well as in terms of significant technology improvement (Wesley, et. al,

2017). Most of these soft skills are not at all considered in the university curricula. Reorientation programs in the university are required to enable graduates to process soft skills.

On the other hand, one important element in making graduates have 'ideal' soft skills is through the involvement of alumni. With good communication, universities may be able to identify graduates' needs from the industry. Davey (2015) conducted a survey on leaders of higher education institutions and stakeholders in the industry world on curriculum design in Europe. It is necessary to align the curriculum with the industry. The graduate model highlights the importance of developing learning scenarios which are similar to the workplace context (Burke & Hutchins, 2007) and teaching general theories and principles on the given skill or disciplinary area (Billing, 2007), to better enable graduates to generalize their learning (Ettington & Camp, 2002). It is found that alumni networks indeed play important role to making this happens. Grant, et. al (2016) offered the

chance to the alumni to act as a mentor to give the chance to the students to be able to give the insight about the course and the activities which are more valuable in the workplace.

To establish good communication for alumni, Egizii (2015) developed a method to build up a collaborative relationship with alumni and community partners. The method is to ensure that alumni and community partners always become an integrated part of the learning process. This method also developing a communication network for lecturers to keep in touch with the alumni. Yao & Tuliiao (2019) involved post-graduates students in developing soft skills in the institution in Vietnamese and South East Asia. The competence or the skills which can be transferred to the students are the skill of analysing and problem-solving, communication skill, and creative thinking (Sheets & Tillson, 2016).

Based on the background, this study aims to make an alumni learning model to added value to university students. This learning model is to help students in preparing soft skills that must be acquired before graduating from universities. This model can be integrated into the university curriculum as a material to reform curriculum referring to stakeholder needs

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research procedure adopted ADDIE development model consisting of five main stages, namely analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation (KOC, 2020; Machsunah et al., 2020; Nadiroh & Susilowibowo, 2018; Safiah et al., 2020). The research stages started from analysis, research design, developing a curriculum model, implementing a curriculum model design, and finally evaluating a curriculum model design product (Kuswandi et al., 2020).

By applying the stages of ADDIE development, this research developed soft skill training model prepared and given directly by alumni. This model was chosen because the stages in this model were simple, easy to be understood, and had systematic structure (Pribadi A., 2009). Moreover, (Dick, W., Carey & Carey, 2009), explained that an effective design in learning process activity must contain systematic process, started from designing, developing, implementing, and evaluating the design itself.

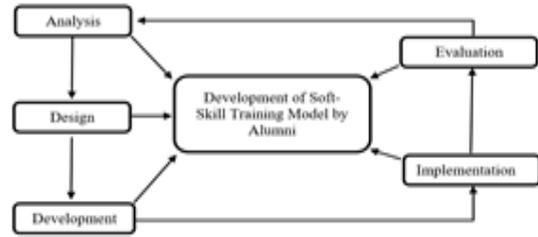


Figure 1. integration of ADDIE model in the process of developing model for soft-skill training

ADDIE Model consists of five main phases or stages that are; (1) Analysis that means a needs analysis to determine the problem and the appropriate solution; (2) Design to determine the specific content for the soft-skill training model; (3) Development is a step to produce the soft-skill training model; (4) Implementation is the stage that doing a training program with the soft-skill model; and (5) Evaluation is the last phases that aim to score the soft-skill model based on user and validator experience. Figure 1 shows the integration of the ADDIE model in the process of developing a model of soft-skill training for university graduates. The training was directly given by alumni. The learning model also a form of empowerment of high education graduates. This model was given to final-year students that carried out in one semester of 10 meetings. Questionnaires with open-ended questions were distributed as the assessment of the training model that had been developed.

Data analysis is a process to systematically find and compile the data obtained from the results of interviews, filed records, and other materials (Sugiono, 2009). The data analysis technique was descriptive quantitative. The technique described the results of product development after validation and feasibility test (Silvia, O & Soenarto, 2010).

$$NA = \frac{\sum \text{Respondent Scores}}{\sum \text{Statement Maximum Scores}} \times 100\%$$

Source: Uno (2017)

Figure 2. Formula for Questionnaire Data Processing

Likert scale with 4 point scales was used to describe respondents' answers. The highest score from Likert scale is 4 (very feasible) and the lowest score is 1 (not feasible). Modification of the Likert scale was based on the statement of Hadi (1991) that modification aimed to eliminate doubtful and neutral answers. Furthermore, the data from the questionnaires were calculated to obtain the score using formula in figure 2.1. The criteria for product feasibility were determined based on the classification adopted from Hariadi (2019) and it can be seen in table 1.1.

Table 1. Classification of the Result of Product Test

Score for Each Criteria	Percentage	Qualification	Action
4	85%-100%	Very Feasible	Implementation
3	75%-84%	Feasible	Implementation
2	55%-74%	Less Feasible	Revision
1	<55%	Not Feasible	Revision

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Phase analysis was based on the analysis of the needs of the industrial world based on the result of alumni Focus group discussion (FGD). It is purposed to find out how the university can develop a capable and professional workforce for graduates. FGD was conducted with alumni representing three study programs of Accounting department. The study results described that soft skills are important in the industrial world. Soft skills will support daily tasks and the main part of a successful career. The FGD was taken online and offline as a confirmation step on soft skills required in the industry world.

The FGD result showed that there are five soft skills that should be mastered by university graduates namely; (1) communication; (2) creative thinking; (3) leadership; (4) interpersonal skills, and (5) intrapersonal skills. These skills will support the graduates to enter the industrial world. After the analysis step, it was followed by the designing stage to improve the soft skills of the university graduates. The training program was prepared by the developer team based on the result of the consultation with the alumni. The training was held with the scheme of Training for Trainer (ToT) as a medium to transfer knowledge between alumni, student representatives, and classmates. The description of soft skill training design is illustrated in figure 3.1.



Figure 3. Soft skill Training Design

In addition to the training curriculum, this study also develops modules as a guideline for training implementation. The module used as the training materials for 14 meetings. In the first 10 meetings, the alumni became the speakers and the student class representatives became the participants. In the following 4 meetings, the student became the mentors for their classmates. The training design in this model also

contained techniques how to deliver training for peers (classmates). Soft skill practice gets from the case study and the role-play methods under the supervision of alumni as the trainers. Training evaluation performed with the self-evaluation report, peer assessment, observation, and pre and post-test.

Alumni had a big part in designing the soft-skills training program. The mentoring program from alumni is helpful to develop business professional awareness to the prospective graduates and being a key part of career development (Renuga & Ezhilan, 2014). In this program, alumni delivered the materials and shared their experiences with the final year student. The perspective of the alumni provides particularly valuable feedback because they have viewed a ‘real-world’ perspective (Carr et al., 2006).

The expert validation results show a percentage of 93.33%, which means the soft-skills training model is valid and can be used. In other hand developer team also take limited field trial to the student as a user. The field trial results showed that the students agree if the training model was adequate to improve soft skills, with a score of 95%. In addition to a questionnaire with a Likert scale developer also give an open-ended questionnaire to the student. Its result concluded enthusiasm in joining the training because students feel soft-skills improvement after joining the activities.

The last ADDIE stage in this study is evaluating based on suggestions taken from the validity and limited field trials. The evaluation result concluded that the developer must be taken revision the written instruction related to peer review assessment.

4. DISCUSSION

Universities are supply graduates with qualified academic skills but unfortunately with an inadequate portion of soft skills. In the fact, hard skills only contribute 15% of professional competence, while soft skills improve 85% the rest (John, 2009). The graduate who has a technical skill without sufficient soft skills will not be assured of a job (Hairi et al., 2011). Mostly, the employers considered teamwork, communication skill, results in orientation, and learning skills as the main score to determine the workforce candidates (Patacsil & Tablatin, 2017; Succi & Wieandt, 2019). Soft skill is a significant element to be mastered by the employee in order to adapt to the work. The main soft skills namely communication skills, interpersonal skills, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking skills (Al Mallak et al., 2020).

In this case, the involvement of alumni is one way to improve the soft skills of college graduates. Alumni become the representatives of the business world as the reflection of university in providing skills for the

graduates. This study develops a soft skills training model involving alumni at each stage.

The training curriculum implemented with the training of trainer (ToT) method to encourage university graduates to improve soft skills according to the needs of the world of work. The training scheme is 14 meetings with alumni as mentors. In this training, class representatives are selected who will participate in training with alumni. Later this class representative will become a mentor for classmates who did not attend the training. Experiences transfer from alumni to the student representatives was the first step of preparing the trainer candidates. A number of students were chosen as a class representative will be soft skills trainer for classmates who were not selected to attend soft skills training.

This training model that involved alumni is in line with the result of study conducted by Qosyim (2011), where a similar forum will bridge the communication with juniors and the alma mater. As a result of the limited field trial, the students also feel that the soft skill training is very useful. This is in line with study conducted by Korath (2014) that a soft skill training program would help the students transitioning from graduate's candidates into the successful workforce. Learning Design in the training form also Improves the technical acceptance of learning, because the key of the learning process is on the engagement of participants students (Sudjana, 2005). On the other hand, the peer training techniques are in line with reaserch conducted by Winarni and Nugraheni (2019) who have successfully implemented it. This technique can upgrade students' soft skills in learning activities.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study was conducted by using the ADDIE development method. The product has been validated by experts and tested with a limited field trial by students a user. The results of validity indicate that the training design is feasible with a score of 93.33%. The limited field trial concluded a result of 95% which is categorized as very feasible. Based on the open-ended statement questionnaire this product needs minor revisions, to change the instructions of peer assessment so that it is easy to be understood. In addition, comments from training participants also show a positive response. Prospective graduates feel ready to work after joining the soft skills program. That is because the training material was delivered directly by alumni who have experience in the industrial world.

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