

HOW DO SOFT SKILLS MARK UP FOR SCHOOL DROPOUTS?

*¹Nyak Mutia Ismail, ²Moriyanti

¹Department of English Education, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education,
Universitas Syiah Kuala, Banda Aceh, Indonesia

² Department of English Education, Iskandarmuda University, Banda Aceh,
Indonesia

*Email: nyakmutiaismail2010@gmail.com

Abstract

A lot of attention and various efforts have been devoted to the character development of students at formal schools. Meanwhile, there are also those who dropped out of school for some certain reasons and conditions which, however, does not clog their future success. This is presumed to be in such a way due to intelligence alone is not what it takes to be successful. This study aimed at assessing school dropouts' soft skill ability. A qualitative design was chosen for this study and the case study model was deliberated as a precise method to carry out. There were 40 school dropouts (aged 7-11) in *Taman Edukasi Anak Pemulung*, Banda Aceh involved as the objects in this study. The *Brooking Soft Skill Report Rubric* was used as an instrument. This rubric was filled by 5 volunteer teachers, who are considered as the subjects of this study. A semi-structured interview was also carried out to triangulate the data. Later, the data were presented in percentage to see each skill result. Afterward, a three-step analysis was utilized to verify the data. The results unveiled that the highest percentage skills that they have are Social Skills (33%), followed by Self-Management Skills (26%), then Academic Soft Skills (22%), and the least is Approaches to Learning (19%). Besides, it was found that although they have a low percentage in Academic and Learning Soft Skills, they still have good skills in Social and Self-Management. This implies that the school dropouts still have chances to succeed. Despite a belief stating that social skills play huge roles in determining someone's success—as most the world's influencing CEOs to show us, academic and learning skills never weigh less in strengthening someone's values.

Keywords: Social Skills, Self-Management, Academic Soft Skills, Life Success, Character Education

INTRODUCTION

Extensive character training tends to numerous extreme issues in instruction while building up a positive school atmosphere. It tends to be successful in any school setting, as our character education illustrate. Instructors from this different exhibit of schools have changed their school societies, diminished order referrals, expanded scholastic accomplishment for all students, created worldwide nationals, and enhanced employment fulfillment and maintenance among educators. Character training incorporates and supplements a wide scope of instructive methodologies, for example, entire youngster instruction, benefit learning, social-passionate learning, and city training. All offer a promise to helping youngsters wind up dependable, mindful, and contributing natives.

Since students invest such a great amount of energy in school, our schools offer a fundamentally vital chance to guarantee that all students get the help and they have to achieve their maximum capacity. Schools that grasp character instruction move toward

becoming spots individuals need to be on the grounds that they draw out the best in everybody. To be successful in schools, character instruction must include everybody—school staff, guardians, students, and network individuals. It must be incorporated into the educational modules and also school culture. At the point when this occurs and school networks join around creating the character, schools see astounding outcomes.

Character instruction is not new—and it is something we would all be able to concur on. It was an imperative goal for all schools and today it is ordered or supported in many countries. The present development is just a notice of instruction's long history of pushing shared qualities and character. Delicate aptitudes, some of the time called key abilities, center abilities, key capabilities, or employability abilities, are those attractive characteristics that apply over an assortment of occupations and life circumstances—qualities, for example, honesty, correspondence, cordiality, duty, polished skill, adaptability, and collaboration.

To emerge in this focused world, a student is required to sharpen numerous aptitudes and capacities which is certainly not a one-day work. A student needs to cut out these abilities by rehearsing each day and this takes quite a while. These attitudes will be useful in schools and universities as well as in building a rewarding proficient profession. Soft skills are aptitudes that can be utilized to pass on thoughts and messages in a viable way. These aptitudes can likewise be utilized to deal with major circumstances while dealing with the generally speaking situation. The delicate abilities are essential in this day and age where the executives and HR are given prime core interest. Soft Abilities also help to grow an incredible identity. It emerges and to push ahead in your consistently exercises to achieve your objectives. These aptitudes are accordingly expected to be utilized in each other circumstance, enormous or little.

These aptitudes also enable students to form themselves into better pioneers, with satisfactory information about themselves, they will know their remains on numerous choices and thoughts. Just when they endeavor to comprehend themselves, they will have the capacity to comprehend others. They will require them the most when they should chip away at specific assignments independent from anyone else, and when they have to know their qualities and shortcomings. At that point, it is relational abilities. Whether it is a student or a working proficient, this ability is required for each person. This is a fundamental ability required for everybody to convey. One needs to see how to confront individuals who are forceful and how to converse with individuals who can be touchy.

Students will discover relational abilities extremely accommodating, in the event that they create them, as it will be valuable in every one of the zones. The vast majority of the administrations focuses on managing individuals somehow. Consequently having great relational abilities isn't just vital, it would appear that a brilliant star on your resume. Afterward, it is administration Abilities. For a student, one will dependably have a choice to make There will be openings like class race, and a student association race and club president or agent pioneer will test a larger part of individuals. So that, pioneers can likewise approach because of circumstances.

Somebody who is brisk in considering and can settle on the correct choices usually facilitates other individuals and draws off an occasion or a circumstance with smooth working. Authority is vital delicate expertise that a student can utilize further in their profession. At the point when the world is loaded up with many negative components, one needs to win hearts with a positive methodology. Beginning from instructors to companions, everybody will search for somebody who drives the scholastic year with an uplifting frame of mind. Students need to sharpen this ability to keep up their cordial air with everybody at an instructive organization. With an inspirational frame of mind, students ought to think of some as key regions that will enable them to build up an uplifting demeanor, for example, high vitality, excitement, assurance, agreement, persistence, decency, consciousness, and comical inclination.

Based on the UNICEF data, there has been a huge advancement in Indonesia towards accomplishing all inclusive essential - or fundamental - instruction. School enrolment rates came to 99 percent in 2015, and as of now, around 27 million kids go to elementary schools. The most recent authority information demonstrates that 'drop-out' rates amid the initial six years of training have decreased to be under 100. There are a couple of contrasts between enrolment rates of young ladies and young men at essential dimension, and by and large little distinction among urban and country territories. In any case, the hole between the territory at the lower end - Papua - and the best performing area - Aceh - is nearly 15 rate points. Quality of learning remains a reason for worry as it prompts high redundancy rates.

One out of 10 children who ought to be in classes at junior high school is not enrolled. More decidedly, the hole in participation in junior high school among country and urban zones - which was 7 percent five years back - has been diminished to only 3 percent (Ricci, 2017). A bigger number of girls—rather than boys—go to junior high school. Drop-out rates increment further towards senior high school; once more, right around one out of five children who finish the junior high school do not proceed into the high school. Linking back this fact to the aim of this research, a query to this research has been formulated as follows: what soft skills are better marked up for the school-dropout children?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Whitehurst (2016) claims that the purpose of soft skills is the efforts to enhance and assess the students' characteristics and personality which is difficult to observe directly and related to the genetic. Kahneman (2011) asserts that skills can be developed through situation and preference. They are acquired by the way of observation and instructional practice. The personality, in contrast, is the habit of behavior that differentiates someone from others that occurs in the dissimilar situation. In fact, personality is complicated to teach because it is related to genetic influence and specific situations. Soft skills also can build someone's personality, bring through the social competence and complete or integrated to the hard skills which are the need of human life. (Cimatti, 2016; Schulz, 2008). As a result, It is strongly suggested for schools to concentrate on the students' skills rather than personality because skills are exclusively observable and not inherited.

In reality, soft skills rely on the students' age - adolescent has diverse needs than a young learner and the specific categories of students' strength and weakness. Feldman

(2018) affirms that teacher can give responsibility for the students to note, reflect and become aware of their academic achievement in order to develop their own soft skills based on their learning objectives. Therefore, teachers can enhance the students' intrinsic motivation to build their soft skills in order to have better academic achievement.

Soft skills can be measured by means of self-report questionnaires. One of the forms in the self-report questionnaire is The Brookings Soft Skills Report Card that assesses the specific soft skills and explains the prominent functions of soft skills (Whitehurst, 2016). The types of measurement of students' soft skills based on *The Brookings Soft Skills Report Card* are social skills, self-management abilities, academic soft skills and approaches to learning that most of the school leaders, teachers and parents have the same opinion about the importance of soft skills to develop. This Brookings Report Card can facilitate the teachers to assess the students' soft skills directly and identify the classrooms that require help in classroom management. It can show the value of soft skills related to the classroom and the description of the students' characteristics and personality as the administrative soft skills report for each student.

Moreover, the *Brookings Report Card* also sums up the student's scores for each category of soft skills in school and the result can be informed to the parents. Each parent obtains their son or daughter's average soft skills score with the teacher's note. It is expected that the result score such as the form of communication. School gives information about how to develop soft skills at home based on the result of the Brookings Report Card so that both school and parents can help students to develop their soft skills.

The Brookings Soft Skills Report Card is not a high-stakes assessment that is designed to assist the teachers in observing their student's soft skills in order to help the students' difficulties and also summative measures that can be applied for accountability (Elias, Ferrito & Mocerri, 2015). Every school can replace or add the items in this Brookings Report Card regarding the students' particular needs. Brookings Report Card also asks the teacher to give the score (range 1(low) - 5 (high)) for each category regarding the observation of students' soft skills. As a result, teachers know the students' particular skill in soft skills which need the support, help, and intervention based on the result of the Brookings Report Card.

For example, the students' Brookings Report Card result shows a low score on confidence in abilities and compliance to study hard. The action taken can be that the teacher can promote the mindset training for students (Bonomo, 2015). The other problems are the students who often come late to school and have bad behavior - emotional attitude with their friends should involve in school counseling/ training and get intervention with their parents (Ludwig & Shah, 2014). Besides that, students can positively socialize with the other students and have compliance to take in action personally or professionally depending on their ability (Dorsey, 2004). To sum up, students' negative personality can be overcome through self-imposed training. Schulz (2008) notes that the precondition of changing the negative personality is that the students should recognize their weakness and try to exchange it.

Based on The Brookings Soft Skills Report Card proposed by Whitehurst (2016), the first category of soft skills is social skills that illustrate the students' interaction among the others as observed by teachers. Main social skills refer to the communication, listening ability, discussion, teamwork, problem-solving, decision-making and firmness (Dubrin, 2004; Engelberg, 2015). The second category, self-management, focuses on students' self-regulation about their ability to dominate their activities through planning, giving attention, rearranging the experience and applying the mental device. Next, academic soft skills are the third category which is social and cognitive domains. The characteristic of academic soft skills is the ability to accomplish the task autonomously. The last category is approaches to learning that refers to the students' involvement in their school, enjoyment in learning and the students' desire in achievement.

The analysis of scores on *the Brookings Report Card* illustrates descriptively. After teachers analyze the result for each student regarding soft skills, they should provide the solution toward their students' problem and consult the school principal what the assistance should be taken for classroom management and self-management. Consequently, the school system can consider developing the students' soft skills through the curriculum (Laureta, 2018) and evaluation process because the result of *Brookings Report Card* can be administrative data about students' preference, engagement, and skills toward the school extracurricular activities.

METHOD

This study involved qualitative approach where the data are more considered for its quality rather than its quantity. To be more specific, the method employed was a case study; in fact, this research sought the soft skill ability of children who were once students, but today are school dropouts. The subject of this research is 5 volunteering teachers who have known the children for at least one year. And the object of this study is 40 children aged 7-13 years old who no longer attend school. These days, the children spend time by being scavenger – picking up recyclable litter from around the street. So we can figure out that the major reason for dropping out of school is the financial concern. The data were collected using an instrument named *Brooking Soft Skill Report Rubric* – a rubric developed for measuring soft skill ability which is adopted from Whitehurst (2016). Later, the data were analyzed by using the percentage formula to see which sub soft skill dominate their ability. As it was necessary to triangulate the finding from the rubric, a semi-structured interview was carried out with the volunteering teachers. The questions during the interview were still the ones denoted in the rubric but were elucidated in-depth: comprehensively and thoroughly. Finally, the three-step analysis was also utilized as suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). First, the irrelevant data found from the field were eliminated (data reduction); then the data were pictured into the form of a graph (data display); and finally, the conclusion was drawn (data verification).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained after the data analysis is posed as in the following. The data percentage about the children's soft skills is provided in the chart below.

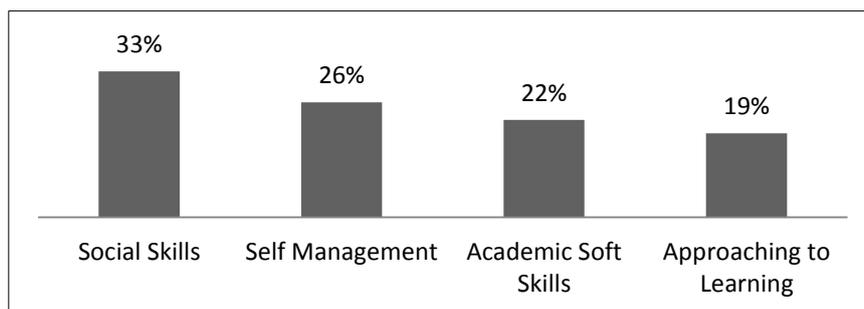


Figure 1. The overall percentage of soft skills

The chart above shows that there are four majoring skills presented. First, it is a social skill. This is the skill with the highest percentage (33%). In the rubric, the questions to this skill concern to providing peers with positive feedback, offering help to peers, initiating interactions with peers, participating in discussions with peers, having friends, carrying out leadership activities, and engaging in appropriate social behavior. It was reported from the data obtained that the children, almost all of them, have superb ability regarding these points. Second, the ability to self-management was also assessed. It can be seen in the chart that, although degrading in percentage (26%), the ability of self-management places the second highest percentage of all. The self-management was concerned on the ability to control anger, accepting legitimate rules, compromising with others to avoid conflicts, responding appropriately to critics from peers, coping with teasing and social disruptions, being cooperative with others, maintaining attention while completing tasks, and being respectful to teachers and staff. Related to their age, indeed, it is not an easy deal to handle all of these criteria as proper as it should, but the percentage shows that they are moderately good at managing themselves. Third, it is their ability in coping with academic tasks, which is only 22% on average. There are eight points in this framework, they are working independently, completing assigned tasks, listening to and carries out teacher directions, producing work of acceptable quality for ability level, bringing required materials to school, arriving at school on time and without undue absences, asking for assistance as needed, asking questions, and using appropriate study skills. Finally, it is their ability to dealing with Approaches to Learning that is the lowest (19%). Under this category, the abilities that they show are Enjoying school, taking on challenging tasks, having confidence, working hard, not anxious and fearful, involved with extracurricular school activities. For a more particular description, each skill is elaborated in a different chart as shown below. First, we can see their ability in each sub-skill under the Social Skill category.

Table 1. Ability in each subskill

No	Social Skills	Average (max 5)
1	Provides peers with positive feedback	5
2	Offers help or assistance to peers	5
3	Initiates interactions with peers	5
4	Participates in discussions with peers	5
5	Has a sense of humor, shares amusement with peers	5
6	Has friends	5
7	Can carry out leadership activities	4.2

8	Engages in inappropriate social behavior	3.8 (reversed)
---	--	----------------

Table 1 above visualizes all of the subpoints in social skills are scored high by the children. We can see that the ability to provide peers with positive feedback is scored the maximum score, 5, by the teachers for all children there. The information obtained from the teacher during the interview is that every child in the community is fond of sharing positivity. For example, when a child cannot collect as many goods as he/she expected, other friends would suggest to come back tomorrow and collect more. Then, they also love helping each other. When one of them is struggling with a heavy sack, others would help. Next, they never bear negative feelings in their heart toward one another. So, any positive interactions can happen at any time, anywhere. Also, when two (or more children) are talking, others would likely to come and join as they feel that they should be informed. The teacher emphasized that this behavior shows a sense of caring among them. Concerning to sense of humor, simply, they would just laugh at anything. They are the children who never complain about the burden they carry. They would kid and others would laugh, or they would just laugh at others' joke. So, having a lot of friends has never come to an obstacle for these children. For the next ability, which is carrying out leadership activities, almost all of them have this ability but there are also some who do not. As they are children of different age. The teacher informed that older children can certainly do tasks associated with leadership concern. So, engaging in inappropriate social behaviors sometimes is also a case for younger children. Next, the children's Self-Management ability is depicted in the table below.

Table 2. Self-management ability

No	Self-management	Average (max 5)
1	Controls displays of temper when angry	3.8
2	Accepts legitimate rules	4
3	Compromises with others to avoid conflict	3.6
4	Responds in socially appropriate ways to criticism from others	3.8
5	Handles teasing and social provocations	3.8
6	Cooperates with others	3.6
7	Maintains attention to tasks	4.8
8	Is respectful to teachers and staff	4.8

Table 2 above indicates that their ability is self-management is not as good as the one in social skills. Initially, the ability to control their anger is 3.8 on average. In the interview, the teacher notified that mostly younger children are easily ignited when there is an outdaring attitude from others. Then, when it comes to obeying rules, mostly they would obey the rules as long as they do not feel confined by them. The ability to do compromising in order to avoid conflicts is also low. The teacher added that if a child confronts with another, the others would group themselves to defend or defy. We can see that although in the critical condition, their social soft skill does appear. From such perspective, the teacher again clarified that it is hard for them to respond mannerly in a raging condition, e.g: criticism, teasing, and social provocations. For example, if there is a child who mocks, he will definitely get involved in a fight unless there is a middle person. As a result, cooperating with peers is sometimes also an issue. If there are two children who are currently in a quarrel, both of them would

refuse to work together for quite some time. However, their ability to maintaining attention can work at its best, as well as the skill to respect teachers and staff. Later, the academic soft skills are as shown in the following table.

Table 3. Academic soft skills

No	Academic soft skills	Average (max 5)
1	Works independently	2.6
2	Completes assigned tasks	2.6
3	Listens to and carries out teacher directions	4.4
4	Produces work of acceptable quality for ability level	2.4
5	Brings required materials to school	1.6
6	Arrives at school on time and without undue absences	2.6
7	Asks for assistance as needed, asks questions	4.4
8	Uses appropriate study skills	1.6

From Table 3 above, we encounter a generally low average for each skill, except for skill number 3 and skill number 7. First, they cannot work independently. The teacher should be ready in the classroom and make a rule if they have any questions – for instance, they should not overlap others' questions. That is the fundamental reason why they would center their attention and execute what teachers told them to do (refers to skill 3), and they tend to ask questions (refers to skill 3). Next, they also have low motivation in completing tasks as they would not accomplish a task unless there is a reward. The teacher clarified that every time she wanted them to do exercise, she promised them a new book, a new pen, some snack, and so on. In such a way, they would certainly do the exercise(s). Concerning the ability to produce work of acceptable quality for ability level, the children are noticeably needy. The teacher added that their critical thinking ability is seriously sluggish and she believed that they profoundly need to go back to school. This explanation also relates to skill 8: using appropriate study skills – which is, indeed, critical. Later, the issue of bringing school supplies to class is not even something that attends their mind. They do not even have pencils. And because of these explanations, the teacher(s) feels grateful even though some of them attend the class on time or not; since the reason for working is a matter in attending class punctually.

Finally, below is provided the table showing the Learning Approach category.

Table 4. Learning Approach

No	Approaches to learning	Average (max 5)
1	Enjoys informal school	4.4
2	Takes on challenging tasks	1.8
3	Has confidence in abilities	1.8
4	Works hard	2.4
5	Is anxious and fearful	4.2 (reversed)
6	Is involved with extracurricular school activities	4.8

Table 4 above shows that the children basically enjoy informal school. However, they would discontinue when stumbled into something they do not understand. As it was mentioned earlier, they do not have the motivation to dig new thing or to learn. So they never intend to take on challenging tasks. The teacher agreed that their confidence is also not satisfying. When the teaching materials are rather difficult, some of them work hard, but others would just give up immediately. As they are not determined in studying, they are never anxious and fearful when they cannot understand or accomplish a task. Still, when there are extracurricular school activities hosted by the teachers and staff, almost all of the children are willing to participate. The teacher stated that the children are fond of extracurricular activities such as games, quick and smart, etc since they have a strong orientation toward gifts.

CONCLUSION

According to these findings, although children from dropout school have a low percentage in academic soft skills and the approach to learning, they still have good skills in social and self-management. They like learning with their peers and sharing their ideas in the learning process because they have strong loyalty with their community in *Taman Edukasi Anak Pemulung* at Kp. Jawa, Banda Aceh. In fact, children often give assistance to others without asking directly because of maintaining the friendship. In addition, for their self-management, they can cooperate in learning and always obey the rule of *Taman Edukasi Anak Pemulung* because they respect the volunteers as their educators and love each other. Even though the social skills and self-management are the important categories of soft skills in assigning the students' success in the future, the academic soft skills and the approach to learning are also a crucial category in influencing someone's personality.

Therefore, the authority and each volunteer as the educator at *Taman Edukasi Anak Pemulung* have the particular obligation regarding their students' problem in certain categories of soft skills to provide the counseling or training program in order to build the balance of their soft skill because they are a primary influencer on their students' soft skills. Moreover, the authority and volunteer as educators can increase their students' consciousness on the need for soft skills for their future. As a result, the children from school dropouts still have the opportunity to succeed in the future because every child has the same rights to be successful in their life.

REFERENCES

- Cimatti, B. (2016). Definition, development, assessment of soft skills and their role for the quality of organizations and enterprises organizations and enterprises. *International Journal for Quality Research* 10(1), 97-130.
- Dorsey, I. (2004). *Soft skills for hard times: A handbook for high achievers*. Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation.
- Dubrin, A. (2004). *Human relations: Interpersonal, job-oriented skills*. new jersey: pearson prentice hall.
- Elias, M. J., Ferrito, J. J. & Mocerri, D. C. (2015). *The other side of the report card: Assessing students' social, emotional, and character development*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.
- Engelberg, S. (2015). A developmental perspective on soft skills. *Speech at "Soft Skills and their role in employability - New perspectives in teaching, assessment and certification"*, workshop in Bertinoro, FC, Italy.

- Feldman, J. (2018). *Grading for equity: What it is, why it matters, and how it can transform schools and classrooms*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Laureta, B. (2018). Soft skills and early childhood education: Strange bedfellows or an ideal match? *Journal of He Kupu*, 5(3), 28-34.
- Ludwig J. & Shah, A. (2014). *Think before you act: A new approach to preventing youth violence and dropout* (The Hamilton Project Discussion Paper No. 2014-02). Retrieved from The Hamilton Project Paper website: http://www.hamiltonproject.org/assets/legacy/files/downloads_and_links/v10_THP_LudwigDiscPaper.pdf
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publishing.
- Ricci, M. C. (2017). *Mindsets in the classroom: Building a growth mindset learning community*. Waco: Prufrock Press.
- Schulz, B. (2008). The importance of soft skills: education beyond academic knowledge. *NAWA Journal of Language and Communication*, 8(2), 146-154.
- Whitehurst, G. J. (2016). Grading soft skills: The Brookings Soft Skills Report Card. *Evidence Speaks Reports*, 2(4), 1-7.