

# STUDY OF EQUIVALENCE EDUCATION PROGRAM STUDENTS' SOFT SKILLS LEVEL IN PREPARING TO ENTER THE COMPETITIVE DIGITAL AGE JOB MARKET

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## **Abstract**

Soft skills are critical for learners at Al Ghofur Community Learning Center to develop in order to equip them with the knowledge, attitude, mentality, and abilities necessary to compete and succeed in the labor market. The purpose of this research is to offer an overview of the mastery of soft skills achieved by students enrolled in the B and C Package Equivalence Education Program at Al Ghofur Community Learning Center as they prepare to enter the competitive digital age job market. The method utilized in this study is descriptive with a qualitative research approach, with the primary objective of defining the students' soft skills level. The Data respondent consisted of 8 students of the B and C Package Equivalence Education Program, one tutor, and one administrative staff at Al Ghofur Community Learning Center. Data are gathered and retrieved via questionnaires, interviews, and documentation studies. The findings indicate that students' soft skills for work preparedness are still lacking at Al Ghofur Community Learning Center, resulting in students' readiness to enter the competitive digital age job market competition.

**Keywords:** soft skills level, equivalence education program, work readiness

## **Abstrak**

*Soft skill* sangat penting bagi peserta didik di Pusat Pembelajaran Komunitas Al Ghofur untuk berkembang dalam rangka membekali mereka dengan pengetahuan, sikap, mentalitas, dan kemampuan yang diperlukan untuk bersaing dan sukses di pasar tenaga kerja. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menawarkan gambaran tentang penguasaan *soft skill* yang dicapai oleh warga belajar di Program Pendidikan Kesetaraan Paket B dan C di Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat Al Ghofur saat mereka bersiap memasuki pasar kerja era digital yang kompetitif. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah deskriptif dengan pendekatan penelitian kualitatif, dengan tujuan utama mendefinisikan tingkat *soft skill* 8 warga belajar Paket B dan C di Pusat Pembelajaran Komunitas Al Ghofur dalam mempersiapkan kesiapan kerja. Data dikumpulkan dan diambil melalui kuesioner, wawancara, dan studi dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menggambarkan bahwa keterampilan *soft skills* kesiapan kerja warga belajar PKBM Al Ghofur masih rendah dan berada pada level kurang, sehingga berakibat terhadap kesiapan kerja warga belajar PKBM Al Ghofur untuk terjun pada persaingan pasar kerja.

**Kata Kunci:** kompetensi, Program Kesetaraan, Kesiapan Kerja

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## INTRODUCTION

Hulu (Hulu, 2020) argues that while receiving feedback from other people, a variety of talents must be learned and possessed, including effective communication, critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, and self-actualization. According to new research, soft skills are more than simply a way to describe ourselves and our relationships with others. According to Kurniawan (Kurniawan, 2020), soft skills are more about developing an individual's significant figure in order to enhance his or her ability to remain on a professional path. Thus, an individual requires soft skills due to their non-technical nature, which is necessary for all individuals to gain valuable experience in terms of knowledge, attitude, and mental preparedness for entering the job market competition. On the other hand, if an individual's soft skills are lacking, Hairi (Lisdiantini, 2019) becomes one of the indicators or opportunities if the individual has not obtained employment.

In this digital and industrial era, soft skills are necessary since the demands of the corporate world and industry rivalry for employment need people to be skilful. The essential skills are essential for creativity, relationship organization in society, intellectual and emotional balance, knowledge expansion, problem solving, critical thinking, teamwork, and life management, (Siswati, 2019). Similarly, Rokhayati asserts that soft skills are critical in preparing and designing the skilled personnel required for the job (Rokhayati, 2017).

According to Daniel Goelman (Rokhayati, 2017), success requires 15% technical skills and the remainder emotional or non-technical skills. Similarly, Andreansyah acknowledges that soft skills are a fundamental component of student learning, and as such, they enter a competition that places a premium on non-technical abilities (Andreansyah, 2018). This is reinforced by Wartoyo, a company that assists in employee selection by incorporating soft skills capable of strengthening each individual's character and encouraging the development of independent attitudes (Yuminah, 2017).

As stated in (Teng, 2019), soft skills are a significant factor in graduates and unemployed in China, with half of graduates finding work in low-wage jobs. As a result, a prospective job seeker must be familiar with the skills required in the world of work or industry in order to minimize failure once in the workforce. According to Ryzana, the technical and non-technical skills that many workers use in the industrial sector are (Ryzana, 2019):

**Table 1.** Technical and Non-Technical Skills in the World of Work (Ryzana, 2019)

Rank	Indicator	Type
1	Two-way communication	Non Technical
2	transparency	Non Technical
3	collaboration	Non Technical
4	personality	Non Technical
5	Performs well	Non Technical
6	Motivational spirit	Non Technical
7	Adjusting to the situation	Non Technical
8	Problem analysis	Technical
9	computer	Technical
10	association	Non Technical
11	Introduction	Non Technical
12	Managerial	Non Technical
13	Optimistic in life	Non Technical

Rank	Indicator	Type
14	Manners	Non Technical
15	justice	Non Technical
16	Excel	Technical
17	clever	Non Technical
18	Sense of humor	Non Technical
19	Entrepreneurship	Non Technical

The data demonstrate that non-technical skills play a role in labor recruitment. Students attempting to qualify for and survive in the job market competition must possess critical soft skills. The study will discuss four soft skills: communication, honesty, cooperation, and interpersonal. According to Lisdiantini (Lisdiantini, 2019), work readiness and soft skills are inextricably linked; the soft skills that individuals possess influence their readiness for work; the more critical the soft skills, the more prepared the individual is to begin his work. Similarly, according to Cahyaningrum, entering the job market requires mastery of soft skills such as attitude, communication, and ethics (Cahyaningrum, 2018). A review of these studies reveals critical issues that need to be discussed regarding the readiness of Package B and C of Equivalence education program's students in preparing to enter the world of work, particularly in Al Ghofur Community Learning Center (CLC) in the Sumedang Regency.

### Soft Skill Concepts

Matteson argues (Jaykumar, 2019) that individuals must have a greater understanding of information technology, specifically non-technical abilities or soft skills, such as communication, interpersonal skills, and honesty. While Goelman stated that (Darmiany, 2016), the ability to solve problems, communicate effectively with others, and collaborate is a non-technical or soft skill. Holford conveys a variety of messages (Asbari, 2020). Soft skills are still viewed in an individualistic manner, even though the process requires communication or interaction with other parties. Similarly, Robles noted that a significant opportunity in an individual's career development is soft skills (Winarni, 2019). Hendriana asserts that soft skills are critical for enhancing interpersonal relationships and self-actualization (Satriawan, 2020). Thus, soft skills are non-technical abilities such as communicating and cooperating in order to advance one's career.

Leckey stated that various non-technical skills are necessary for leadership, including knowledge, collaboration, managing intellectual and emotional intelligence, resolving problems with solutions, managing stress, managing time, animating leaders' character, and decision-making ability (Jaykumar, 2019). This is consistent with Winarni's assertions (Winarni, 2019). Soft skills are most effective when a balance of technical and non-technical skills is maintained. Similarly, Grugulis Berglund argued that graduates with a creative nature are more likely to survive in a world where competition is fierce (Zammi, 2018). Suyanto observed mastery of soft skills from an emotional and spiritual intelligence perspective through various actual activities experienced by individuals when diving directly into the field (Firdaus, 2017). Additionally, according to Doe the world of work is in desperate need of passionate individuals who are self-motivated, civilized, skilled in oral and written communication, emotion management, collaboration, cooperativeness, critical thinking, and able to solve problems (Zammi, 2018). This is consistent with Frantz's assessment (Jaykumar, 2019). Employers place a premium on teamwork, communication, and interpersonal skills over academic credentials and school of origin. Thus, communication, integrity, teamwork, and interpersonal skills all fall under the category of soft skills. Suyanto stated that the way to begin

mastering various soft skills, including the first step with classroom learning, which involves interaction between educators and students, presentations in front of the class, verbal and written communication, and a leadership spirit (Firdaus, 2017). Winarni noted that mastery of soft skills requires training and mentoring to hone them to the point where development is required (Winarni, 2019).

### **Workplace Competencies**

According to Silfia, the world of work is influenced by the diverse skills that resources possess. Not only technical abilities are required, but also non-technical abilities (Silfia, 2018). Harahap stated that an individual's work is inextricably linked to the assistance of others in completing the work (Harahap, 2019). To achieve maximum results, both individuals and teams must be able to adapt to and interact with the diverse personalities of each person. Furthermore, according to Juwita a the world of work as a starting point where beginning a real-life challenge, having a stable job, and having a brilliant career is the desire of everyone who wishes to succeed, effort and hard work alone are insufficient, equipped with a strong mentality and maturity of thought (Juwita, 2021). Workers must master work skills, which include knowledge, attitude, and mental components (Lisdiantini, 2019). Biased employees use these abilities as guides, instructions, and directions for performing their jobs properly. Employers, whether private or public, have criteria in place for each position/position that adhere to the standards of competence. Employees must demonstrate maturity in their being, thinking, commitment, and sense of responsibility.

According to Spencer, the business world and industry have established competency standards for their employees, including the following:

- a. intelligent and motivated by a sense of mission in their work
- b. thoroughness in one's work
- c. vivacious and vivacious
- d. insatiable curiosity
- e. demonstrate empathy
- f. acquainted with consumers
- g. ability to communicate verbally and in writing (Lisdiantini, 2019)

Based on Cleary, beside the standard competencies required by employers, job skills in general have an effect on employees, including possess fundamental skills, personal skills, strong social skills, concept management skills, and entrepreneurial skills (Lisdiantini, 2019). These studies demonstrate that skills such as communication, emotional management, perseverance, and creative thinking can be quantified and have standards.

### **Working Readiness**

Permana stated that the objectives that various individuals must achieve, including attitudes, knowledge, and skills, as a guide for the development of maturity, which is frequently referred to as readiness (Permana, 2019). While according to Slameto, an individual confronted with a variety of circumstances and prepared to respond, is said to be prepared (Hulu, 2020). Anni conveyed that a reference in readiness, has emotional readiness in acting, physical readiness, and taste readiness, among others (Lisdiantini, 2019). As a result, readiness refers to a person's state, nature, strength, and adjustment in dealing with and responding to a particular situation. Chaplin defined work as the physical and mental effort required to complete a task or activity (Hulu, 2020). Similarly, Hasibuan referred to the various physical and mental activities required to complete a job (Hulu, 2020). Nonetheless, distinct messages are conveyed by Fataron which defined working as the activity of doing something for the purpose of earning a living or

sustaining one's existence (Fataron, 2019). Work can be defined as an activity carried out by humans in a relatively short period of time and on a routine basis in order to meet a variety of needs and that results in the production of goods or services in order to obtain material satisfaction.

According to Fataron, job readiness refers to an individual's willingness and ability to perform an activity related to his or her field as a result of physical, mental, and experience maturity (Fataron, 2019). Permana conveyed the same message about work readiness: an individual who possesses a balance of physical maturity, mental maturity, and experience necessary for job completion (Permana, 2019). According to Mason, the attitude that a worker has if he is already work-ready contributes to the achievement of his association's target or objectives, as well as the fulfillment of skills in terms of knowledge, attitude, and understanding (Harahap, 2019). Ferns stated that both business and industry expect prospective employees to possess intelligence in addition to the ability necessary for their particular field of expertise (Harahap, 2019). A condition or a person is said to be ready to work if they are mature physically and mentally in the work environment and capable of producing satisfactory work results in the form of goods and services.

The following sections discuss the various aspects of job readiness that prospective employees must master. Brady argued that possesses abilities, communicates verbally and in writing, is knowledgeable about health and occupational safety, possesses a strong sense of responsibility, and possesses a positive outlook on life (Erfelina, 2017). According to Ndraha, aspects of work readiness include the ability to work in teams, have a positive attitude, and be critical and firm about the establishment (Syaila, 2017). According to Yosoef, work readiness includes communication, teamwork, leadership, critical thinking & problem solving, entrepreneurship, technology-related skills, long-term learning & information management, ethical & moral values, and social skill (Angraini, 2021). Nonetheless, Kuswana stated that various aspects of work readiness can help solve problems and accept all risks associated with the environment and work (Muspawi, 2020). According to the study, work readiness characteristics include communication, honesty, cooperation, and interpersonal relationships.

According to (Engking et al., 2012), one of the non-formal education services is Equivalence education program, which is hosted by the Community Learning Center (CLC). Non-formal education serves three purposes: as a substitute for formal education, as an enhancer of formal education, and as a complement to formal education.

## **METHOD**

This research utilized qualitative descriptive method to examine the soft skill level of Package B and Package C equivalence education program's students learning conditions in the face of digital age job market competition. Spreading questionnaires, conducting interviews, and conducting documentation studies became techniques used by researchers to obtain and collect data. The data results were calculated using descriptive statistics, data from questionnaires on soft skills and work readiness utilized Likert scale to categorize responses as positive, neutral, or negative.

The research was conducted at the Al Ghofur Community Learning Center, which is located in Dusun Tarikolot RT 02 RW 04 Mekarmulya Village, Situraja District, Sumedang Regency, West Java. Al Ghofur Community Learning Center provides equivalence education program, courses, and training in information and communication technology. The research subjects were

3 Package B class IX students and five Packaged C class XII students, one tutor, and one administrative staff. Purposive sampling was used to select the eight citizens studied in this study in order to represent the aspirations and abilities of the students. The researchers used purposive sampling techniques, with main qualification that students have studied for up to five semesters.

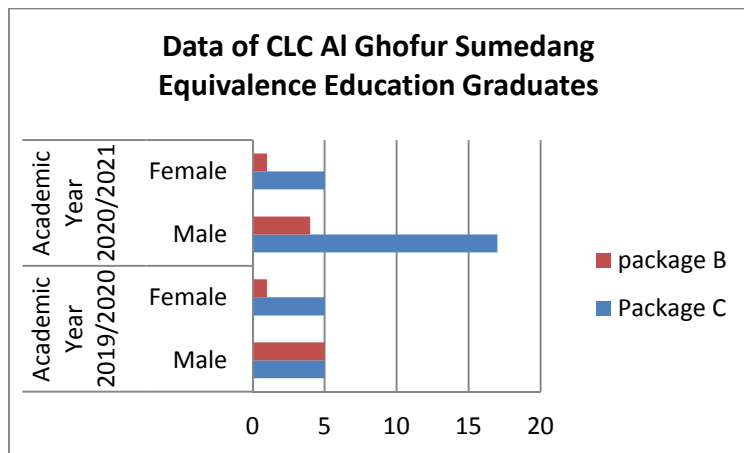
**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Results**

Each year, the number of graduates studying at CLC Al Ghofur Sumedang has fluctuated. The Equivalence Education program Package C has the highest number of graduates. Table 1 contains information about Community Learning Center al Ghofur Sumedang graduates over the last two years.

**Table 2.** Data of CLC Al Ghofur Sumedang Equivalence Education Graduates

No	Program	Academic Year		Total Students	Academic Year		Total Students
		2019/2020			2020/2021		
		L	P	L	P		
1	Package C	5	5	10	17	5	22
2	Package B	5	1	6	4	1	5



**Figure 1.** Data of CLC Al Ghofur Sumedang Equivalence Education Graduates

As shown in the diagram 1, the number of graduates of citizens enrolled in the package C equality education program is greater than the number of citizens enrolled in the package B program.

Prior to administering the soft skills for working readiness questionnaire to Package B and C students in CLC Al Ghofur, the questionnaire was validated by three tutors at the center. Table 2 summarizes the validation results.

**Tabel 3.** Instrument Validation’s Result

Component	Mean	Mark
Clear instructions	4,00	Valid
The Language is easy to understand	4,00	Valid

Component	Mean	Mark
Default language properties	4,00	Valid
Clear sentence structure	3,67	Valid
Unambiguous sentences	3,67	Valid
Coherent arrangement	4,00	Valid
The relevance of the study to the capabilities achieved	4,00	Valid
The scope of the material is clearly drawn and easy to follow	4,00	Valid
The sequence of material is clear and easy to follow	4,00	Valid
Clarity of material in accordance with the objectives achieved	4,00	Valid
Ease to understand material	4,00	Valid

The soft skills for working readiness level of Package B and C students at CLC Al Ghofur Sumedang can be known from the results of the dissemination of questionnaires that have been conducted by researcher. The researcher transformed it into numerical values and analyzed it using the Students' response criteria. The following data is a description of the processing of the value of soft skill for working readiness questionnaire distributed to Package B and C students at CLC Al Ghofur.

Table 4. *Soft Skills* for working readiness of Package B and C students at CLC Al Ghofur

No	Program	Response Criteria	Communication		Integrity		Cooperation		Self Management	
			f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	Package C	Negative			4	80%	4	80%	4	80%
		Positive	5	100%	1	20%	1	20%	1	20%
2	Package B	Negative			1	67%	2	67%	2	67%
		Positive	3	100%	2	33%	1	33%	1	33%

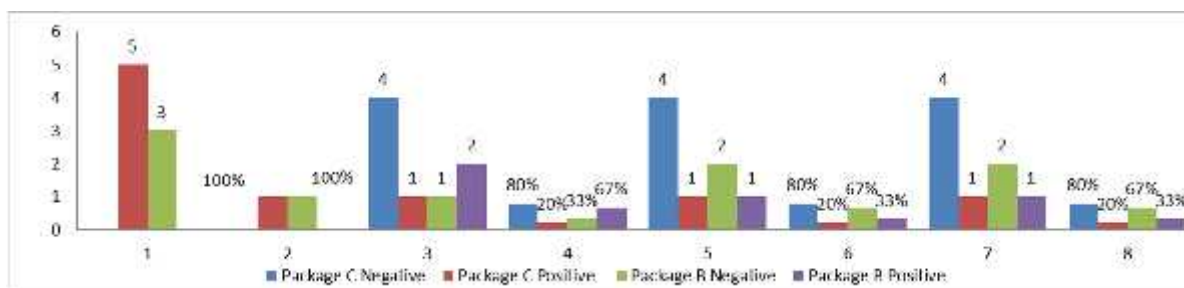


Figure 2. *Soft Skills* for working readiness of Package B and C students at CLC Al Ghofur

According to diagram 2, the readiness of soft skills works for the field of communication is 100%. Both package C and package B provide a positional response, with up to 80% responding negatively and 20% responding positively to the category of integrity field for package C and up to 33% responding negatively and 67% responding positively for package B. Thus, students' soft skills for working readiness is still lower than what can be seen from the four soft skills in preparing to enter the competitive digital age workforce. While only communication skills receive positive responses, three other abilities such as integrity, cooperation, and self-management receive a mix of positive and negative responses. However, the majority of people

have a negative reaction to the three soft skills. Thus, the capacity of students to acquire soft skills has a significant impact on their readiness for work. The data in Table 4 below pertains to the CLC Al Ghofur Program Package C graduates who have obtained employment.

**Table 4.** Al Ghofur Program Package C Graduates Who Have Obtained Employment

Academic Year	Working Numbers		
	Company Employee	Entrepreneur	Daily Freelance Labor
2016/2017	2	7	4
2017/2018	2	5	3
2018/2019	1	3	3



**Figure 3.** Data of Package C Graduates

From diagram 3 it can be found that Package C students at CLC Al Ghofur were prepared for work, as evidenced by alumni data indicating that all alumni fall into three categories of employment: company employees, entrepreneurs, and workers. However, researchers discovered that job readiness in the face of job market competition remains low due to the company's low employee count.

From the in depth interview results with a tutor at CLC Al Ghofur obtained the following problems concerning the students' low level of soft skills for working readiness:

1. Students' were lack of knowledge regarding life skills as a means of acquiring life skills
2. a dearth of life skills training provided by the CLC Al Ghofur, particularly in the area of soft skills materials.
3. a dearth of qualified facilitators capable of developing materials in the field of soft skills

From the questionnaire and in depth interview data, it is found that the soft skills level for working readiness of Package B and C students at CLC Al Ghofur is still low, not only due to internal and external factors affecting the students, but also due to institutional factors affecting Community Learning Center units.

## Discussion

The Package B and C students' in CLC Al Ghofur only master one aspect of the soft skills required by employers, namely the communication aspect, whereas the employer requires as many as four aspects of soft skills. According to research, the length of education does not



guarantee that CLC Al Ghofur's Package B and C students are prepared, have a positive attitude, and have the mentality necessary to compete in the job market. According to (Silfia, 2018), improving work readiness can be accomplished through additional learning programs emphasizing the importance of soft skills.

The responses to a questionnaire about the soft skills and working readiness of CLC Al Ghofur's Package B and C students demonstrated that they lack work readiness in terms of soft skills; as evidenced by the data, the percentage of three aspects of soft skills, namely integrity, cooperation, and self-management, is less than 35%. However, the soft skills component of communication has a 100% achievement rate, with respondents responding positively to the communication component. The findings of this study corroborate Silvia's assertion (Silfia, 2018). In the world of work, soft skills such as self-management, problem solving, commitment, motivation, teamwork, oral communication, and time management are required. Although communication is a factor in determining soft skill readiness, there are three additional factors to consider: cooperation, self-management, and integrity. This is consistent with (Santoso, 2019) which emphasize on the importance of soft skills in promoting work readiness prior to entering the workforce, including abilities to manage learning needs, concept comprehension, life skills, self-management, and communication. Unlike (Rokhayati, 2017), the soft skills support component places a premium on communication skills. Thus, while the communication aspect of CLC Al Ghofur's Package B and C students is high, the researchers assume that while all respondents have positive communication, other supporting factors such as integrity, cooperation, and self-management remain below 35%. As a result, the condition of CLC Al Ghofur's Package B and C students soft skill level is deteriorating. Andreansyah confirmed in his research, stating that the category of soft skills, which ranges from 44% to 66%, is in poor condition for preparing to enter the world of work (Andreansyah, 2018).

Because the lack of soft skills is not the primary life determinant associated with CLC Al Ghofur's Package B and C students in preparing to enter the world of work, Turistiati believes that students not to be concerned if they lack soft skills because the ability can be honed and developed through various work experiences or by following various career paths (Turistiati, 2019). Thus, CLC Al Ghofur's Package B and C students soft skills should be enhanced through education and training in soft skills in order to better prepare them for job market competition.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of the study revealed that the soft skills of work readiness of Package B and C Students enrolled in the CLC Al Ghofur Sumedang remain low and at a substandard level. As a result, students should be more prepared to learn soft skills in order to enter the world of work. Individuals learn to be less directive in determining the course of their lives, even when they possess highly qualified hard skills in their field but having low level of soft skills. Researchers recommend socializing soft skills through additional training or education. Package B and C Students of CLC Al Ghofur must possess soft skills such as communication, integrity, cooperation, and self-management in order to be prepared to compete in the world of work.

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