

Developing soft skills for students of economics major at Tan Trao University, Viet Nam in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution

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Abstract

In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, it is required that young intellectuals, including economics students, not only gain good professional knowledge but also should equip and develop necessary soft skills for themselves to meet the increasing requirements from work organization and enterprises. This study conducted the survey of 170 students who major in economics at Tan Trao University, Tuyen Quang Province to assess the current situation of developing students' soft skills, there by the research proposes effective solutions to enhance and develop soft skills for students in general and economics students in particular to meet the requirements of human resources in the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era.

Keywords: Soft skills, economics students, The Fourth Industrial Revolution, Tan Trao University, Tuyen Quang Province

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1. Introduction

Educational innovation towards students' competence development, in which focusing on supporting learners necessary skills to be able to work effectively after graduation is a common trend of advanced education systems in the world as well as in Viet Nam (Waggoner, 2006). Research results by sociologists has shown that most people who succeeded in their job are due to gaining 25% of good professional knowledge, the remaining 75% is base on mastering and flexible using soft skills (Giguere & Sylvain, 2008).

A survey on the priorities in recruitment of business enterprises conducted by CareerBuilder-The World's Largest Employment and Recruitment Network, shown that with a graduated student if he has got excellent soft skills, he will an advantage in being accepted by employers over other candidates (Son, 2019). Accordingly, before graduation, students should actively equip themselves with necessary soft skills such as: communication, time management, team work, leadership. It would help them to meet the increasing requirement from business enterprises.

In Vietnam, according to statistics of the Vietnam Institute of Education Research, there have been over 80% of graduates lack soft skills; nearly 40% of students could not find suitable jobs (Anh, 2018). Therefore, many universities are actively transforming their approach in educational programs from the direction of equipping knowledge to the orientation of competence development for learners. Human competence is developed and evaluated on three aspects: knowledge, skills and attitudes (Viet Nam Ministry of Education and Training, 2010). If so, universities need to make a comprehensive change in all elements of the educational process, in which soft skills education needs to be in parallel with professional training and career skills.

In recent years, Tan Trao University has been training in the form of credits, transforming the form of training from focusing on knowledge acquisition to comprehensive development of learners' competences and qualities. The Faculty of Economics - Business Administration of the university is one of the faculties that has been actively applying this new form of training, however, the implementation is still very limited and not comprehensive. Currently, the faculty's training program does not have modules related to soft skills training, the capacity development-oriented training process for learners only focuses on integrating teaching methods, study and teaching organization (Faculty of Economics - Business Administration, 2020). On the other hand, the process of studying and participating in collective activities shows that students of economic major still lack confidence, dynamism and do not have good skills in solving problems.

Equipping soft skills not only helps students to study well at university, but also can practice their bravery to have the opportunity to find a good job after graduation. Particularly for students of the economic major, developing the necessary soft skills towards competence development is an objective requirement that should be concerned by scientists and educators in order to contribute to improving the quality of student training and meeting the actual needs of the employers and the labor market.

By using descriptive statistics and comparative statistics methods, conducting a survey with 170 students of Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Tan Trao University, Tuyen Quang, Vietnam, this study was carried out to assess the current situation of soft skills development for economics students at Tan Trao University, thereby, to propose some solutions to improve and enhance soft skills for students at Tan Trao University in general and students majoring in economics in particular.

2. Research results

1. The role of soft skills training for students of economic major in the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era

The Industrial Revolution 4.0 is taking place strongly in all fields and in every country including Vietnam. Students who will be the main workforce of the future must be aware that they will work in a globalized and constantly evolving environment of technological innovation. More and more jobs are based on soft skills rather than knowledge or measurable skills (Majid, Liming, Tong, & Raihana, 2012). Educational qualifications and degrees are important criteria for assessing a graduate's ability, but they are only necessary conditions. Additional skills, soft skills, are sufficient conditions for each student to be more successful in life. Enhancing the content of soft skills education for students will help them meet the requirements of the fundamental and comprehensive renovation of education and training in the renovation period.

Equipping soft skills for students to continue self-study, self-practice professional skills and implement the philosophy of "lifelong learning", "learning to live together", "learning to live together" "learning to work" after graduation will help them regularly update the changes of science and technology and to have enough skills to handle all situations that occur during daily work. Equipped with soft skills in the learning environment, students will actively participate in social activities, know how to professionally and creatively organize extracurricular activities and improve academic results, knows how to establish friendly relationships with others people, have more career opportunities and surely solve all problems arising in life more effectively.

Soft skills help students develop their careers effectively. With the characteristics of many economic sectors, they often have to contact, meet and exchange with partners so they must master communication and negotiation skills to be able to persuade partners to cooperate in business. Hence, soft skills will helps them to work more productivity and quality and easily adapt to any working environment.

2. Current status of soft skills of students majoring in economics at Tan Trao University

2.1 Evaluating level of soft skills mastery of students in the economic major at Tan Trao University

The study conducted a survey of 170 economics students at Tan Trao University on self-assessment of their level of soft skills mastery according to the criteria. The results are shown in Table 2.1

Table 2.1 Level of fluency of soft skills of students of economic major at Tan Trao University

Skill	Level (n=170)					
	Good		Medium		Weak	
	Quantity	%	Quantity	%	Quantity	%
1. Presentation skills	30	17,6	68	40	72	42,4
2. Teamwork skills	42	24,7	51	30	77	45,3
3. Time management skills	11	6,5	24	14,1	135	74,9
4. Communication and behavior skills	34	20	79	46,5	57	33,5
5. Problem solving skills	25	14,7	45	26,5	100	58,8
6. Negotiation skills	18	10,5	37	21,8	115	67,7
7. Creative thinking skills and entrepreneurship	15	8,8	37	21,8	118	69,4
8. English level	21	12,4	32	18,8	117	68,8

The survey results show that the majority of over 70% of students self-assessed their level of fluency of soft skill only at medium or weak level includes skills: Time management skills (74.9%); Creative thinking skills and entrepreneurship (69.7%); Negotiation skills (67.7%); English skills (68.8%). This shows that the soft skills of economics students at the University are still weak. These are also typical limitations of students at a higher education institution in the mountains.

Teamwork skills is the highest level of proficiency of students, however it reached 42% only. It is because in the teaching process, teachers have combined diversified modern teaching methods for students to promote positive and proactive elements in learning. They also give examples of reality issues and guide how to solve problems in groups to enhance the ability to work together professionally. This is also the reason why the communication and behavior skills of economics students at the University have a high level of proficiency, ranking second after teamwork (reaching 34%).

Among soft skills surveyed above (Table 2.1), time management skills is the weakest level of proficiency. This shows that students' skills of living, studying and working have been not scientific. They have poor decision-making ability and always influenced by external factors that caused work delay.

To clarify why students are weak in personal time management, the authors conducted a survey of the causes leading to this situation. The results are shown in Figure 2.1.

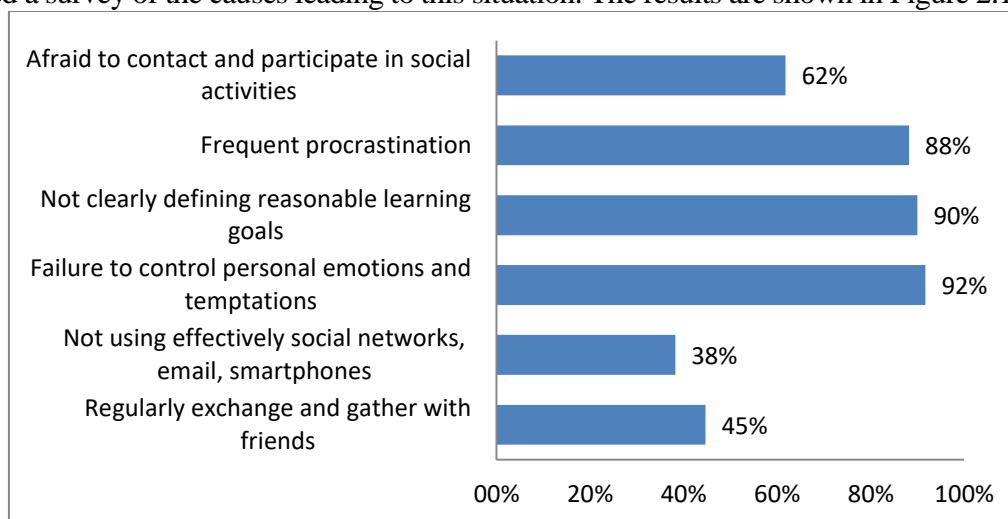


Figure 2.1 Causes of ineffective personal time management

Through the chart above, we see: the most causes that make students have ineffective personal time management is they limited in knowing how to control emotions and personal temptations so they use a lot of time to satisfy their personal needs and work spontaneously or students are also aware that their time management is not reasonable but they refuse to change. This is very evident when the reasons ranked in the 2nd and 3rd positions leading to the ineffective time management of students are: not clearly defining reasonable learning goals and often delaying in working.

Therefore, the best way to get rid of a bad habit is to replace it with a good one that could be able to control emotions and personal temptations. For example, encouraging students to get into the habit of listing everything they want to achieve in the future, breaking it down in order of priority, which goals is accomplished first, which are done later, which are short-term goals and which is the long-term. When we have the

right goals and direction, we will have the will and determination to make the most of every focused time.

2.2 Assessing the reality of participating in soft skills training programs of students majoring in economics at Tan Trao University

Although the economics training program of the Faculty of Economics - Business Administration does not have direct training modules on soft skills for students but other faculties and departments of the University still organize training programs and fostering programs for students on soft skills such as: Youth Union organized community volunteering activities, Students Union established student clubs, Department of Scientific Management and International Cooperation organized short-term internship abroad programs. These are all good conditions for students to participate in learning and fostering soft skills for themselves. This also shows that the school has begun to pay attention to soft skills training for students.

The study conducted to survey students' participation in activities to improve soft skills of the students during their period at Tan Trao University (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 Students' participation in soft skills improvement activities during their study at Tan Trao University

Activities	Participation	
	Number of Participants	Ratio (%)
Participating in a few student clubs	45	26,5
Participating in short-term internships programs abroad	10	5,9
Participating in extracurricular activities, social volunteering organized by the Youth Union	65	38,2
Participate in some skills training courses organized by other units under the university	35	20,6

The survey results at Table 2.2 show that the number of students participating in these programs is still small. The number of economics students participating in all programs is less than 50%, of which the highest are union and association activities (reaching 38.2%). For the short-term internship program abroad, the survey results show that the program has not been paid much attention and interest by students of the economic major, the number of students participating is only at 5.9%. One of the reasons leading to this situation is because the ability to use English of them is still weak, so students are afraid and do not dare to register to participate. This is a big weakness for students of economic major when they graduate to work in the 4.0 industrial revolution era. Students are still in a stagnant state and do not want to change, have not set up goals and improve themselves to achieve good goals in the future.

To examine the reasons that lead to the fact that students of economic major of Tan Trao University rarely participate in soft skills training courses, the authors conducted a survey on students' evaluation the effectiveness of participating in the above programs.

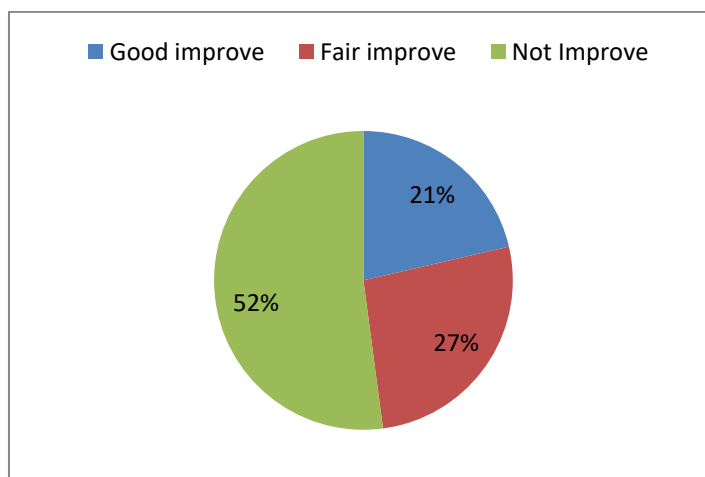


Figure 2.2 The effectiveness of participating in support programs to improve soft skills organized by the university

Through the Figure 2.2, we see that the ratio of students who considered that participating in programs helped them to improve soft skills is 26.5% meanwhile the ratio of students who think that it is not improved is 52%, the remaining supposed it is normal. This shows that the above soft skills training and fostering programs have helped a part of students significantly improve their soft skills. However, the numbers of students who think that their soft skills are not improved are high, this might be because the soft skills training and fostering programs are not really attractive or the reasons come from the students themselves because of their poor self skills so they should be afraid to participate in those activities.

The above survey results show that although economics students at Tan Trao University are aware of the important and necessary role of soft skills, they have not wanted to change or are afraid to change. This caused their weaknesses in studying and working, meanwhile the peculiarity of learning soft skills is the more you participate in the practice of soft skills, the more you develop your soft skills.

2.3 Assessing the advantages and limitations of developing soft skills for students economic major at Tan Trao University

* Advantages

Most students have awareness of the importance of soft skills in learning and performing tasks according to plans and estimated time. Skills such as: presentation, teamwork, communication and behavior accounted for 58.66% good and very good. In the learning process, students are provided some knowledge about making plans, time control, have the ability to think, analyze, synthesize and connect data quite well. The students' presentation skills are quite good, which also assesses the students' ability to reason rigorously and scientifically. The application of form of learning and credit-based training has created self-discipline and initiative elements in the learning process. Students participating in Union - Association activities and participating in short-term internship programs abroad show their dynamism, creativity and enthusiasm.

* Limitations

In general, most of the students who major in economics at Tan Trao University have not mastered all the above soft skills. Skills included time management, negotiation, creative and entrepreneurial thinking and using English skills are at weak level (over 60%). Students are influenced by their own emotional factors, spontaneous work. It

leded them to low academic and work results. The student's movement activities in Union - Association activities have been not diversified, not creative, not a breakthrough about ideas coming from the problem of weak creative thinking skills.

It can be affirmed that most students have paid little attention to equipping themselves with soft skills, still taking advantage of their time to implement daily routines rather than investing in learning and fostering skills.

* The cause of the limitations

- Subjective reasons:

There is a part of students who are not fully aware of the importance of soft skills.

Students' consciousness of soft skills practice is still low and they have not actively seized opportunities in the process of studying and movement activities to improve their soft skills.

- Objective reasons:

Lacking of environment around for students to practice soft skills

Soft skills training activities at the university: although the school has changed from year based training to credit-based, there is no dedicated department to develop soft skills for students. The regular training programs at the economics faculty do not have a separate module on soft skills.

The link between university and businesses: compared to some other universities and colleges in the country, Tan Trao University still have not had a close connection with enterprises, especially large business companies which is outside the province.

3. Conclusion and Discussion

From the research results on the current situation of soft skills of students of economic major at Tan Trao University, the authors believe that the students' soft skills are not high. The surveyed students are at weak level of mastering soft skills. They have not really had a sense of initiative in learning and cultivating their own soft skills.

The study proposes some solutions to overcome the existing limitations and develop soft skills for students of economic major at Tan Trao University as follows:

Firstly, it is necessary to use the soft skills module in the regular training programs of the economic major. This course needs to be proposed from the faculties of training, in order to do this, the faculties need to choose an appropriate curriculum, design skills to teach, improve teaching methods, determine teaching time and the university creates favorable conditions for teaching facilities and suitable studying environment. In order to improve the quality of human resources that the university training, the faculties need to propose a new standard of outcome that requires students to achieve the most necessary basic soft skills.

Secondly, enhancing students' awareness of improving soft skills is necessary. In the process of training, teachers need to emphasize the importance of soft skills for students and they should practice it through learning methods. Teachers should guide students on how to work effectively in groups, using fluently presentation method at class and self-study at home. The Youth Union, Student Union, and the Centre for consultancy and Student Support should organize many seminars on soft skills, provide exchange programs with representatives of businesses so that students can clearly see the importance of soft skills in the future working environment.

Third, create an environment for students to practice soft skills. The university's Youth Union and Student Union can orient students to establish some more models of

student volunteer clubs: such as a volunteer club on environmental protection, a volunteer club to prevent social evils, the soft skills club, event organizing club and so on with the diversity of more exciting activities; Organizing skill training programs for students and helping them to apply theory into practice; In addition, the university facilitates and encourages volunteer teams and clubs in the school to organize student programs by themselves. The Youth Union and Student Union need to strengthen the autonomy and self-responsibility for students about their programs.

Fourth, improve the connection between businesses and training institutions to adapt to the development of the economy in the 4.0 era. The university and faculties need to actively strengthen linkages with businesses inside and outside the province and at the same time coordinate with businesses in consulting soft skills for students, especially for final year students in which with the participation of human resources experts, companies providing high-quality human resources, and business representatives inside and outside the province./.

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