

THE ROLE OF SOFT WORK SKILLS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK COMPETENCIES AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES OF STUDENT WORKERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PAMULANG

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Abstract

Changes in the structure and dynamics of the world of work in the era of globalization and the Industrial Revolution 4.0 require human resources to not only master technical skills (hard skills), but also non-technical skills (soft skills) that play an important role in supporting career success. This study aims to analyze the role of soft work skills on the relationship between work competencies and career opportunities of working students at Pamulang University. This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method through the distribution of questionnaires to working students in various industrial sectors. The variables studied included soft work skills (communication, teamwork, adaptability, and leadership), work competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitudes), and career opportunities (vertical and horizontal mobility). Data analysis was carried out using a path analysis model to measure the direct and indirect relationships between variables. The results of the study show that soft work skills have a significant effect on the work competence and career opportunities of working students. In addition, soft skills play a role as a mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between work competencies and career opportunities. Working students with high soft skills are able to optimize their competencies and have wider career opportunities. These findings affirm the importance of developing soft skills through the college curriculum, job training, internships, and active involvement in student organizations. Thus, universities need to play an active role in building a learning ecosystem that is not only academically oriented, but also on strengthening character, communication, and leadership to create adaptive and competitive graduates in the modern labor market.

Keywords:

Soft Skills, Work Competencies, Career Opportunities, Student Workers, Pamulang University.

Introduction

In the era of globalization and the industrial revolution 4.0, the dynamics of the world of work have changed very rapidly. Competition between individuals in obtaining jobs and in developing careers is becoming increasingly intense. This condition requires each individual not only to have hard skills or technical skills that

are in accordance with their field of work, but also soft skills related to personal, social, and emotional abilities that support work effectiveness. According to Robbins and Judge (2017), a person's ability to work is not only measured by his technical skills, but also by his ability to adapt, communicate, and cooperate in a dynamic work environment. Thus, soft skills are now one of the important indicators in assessing the quality of human resources.

This phenomenon is becoming increasingly relevant in the midst of the challenges of today's world of work that demands flexibility, creativity, and critical thinking skills. Various studies have shown that modern companies are no longer only looking for employees who excel academically, but also those who have good interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. In line with the findings of Robles (2012), soft skills such as communication skills, work ethics, responsibility, and the ability to work in a team are the main factors that determine a person's success in the workplace. In other words, a person who has high technical competence but does not have adequate soft skills will face difficulties in adapting and interacting in a professional environment.

In the context of student workers, especially in the Pamulang University environment, the existence of soft skills is a very important aspect to be researched. A student worker is an individual who performs two roles at once: as a student who studies and as a worker who has professional responsibilities. This condition demands a balance between academic ability and practical ability in the world of work. These challenges can train discipline, responsibility, time management, and communication skills – all of which are part of soft skills (Suharyadi, 2020). However, not all working students are able to develop these skills optimally due to the time pressure, fatigue, and demands of two roles that are carried out simultaneously.

On the other hand, work competence is also an important factor in building a career. According to Spencer and Spencer (1993), work competence includes a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that a person uses to achieve effective performance in his or her work. This competency reflects a person's ability to carry out duties and responsibilities in accordance with the standards set by the organization. However, work competence will not develop optimally without the support of good soft skills. For example, critical thinking skills, communication skills, and leadership will strengthen the application of one's technical competencies in the world of work (Rahmawati & Santoso, 2021). Therefore, soft skills can act as a mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between work competencies and career opportunities. A person who has high work competence but is unable to communicate ideas, work together, or lead a team, tends to experience obstacles in developing his or her career. On the other hand, individuals with good soft skills will find it easier to gain trust, build networks, and get opportunities for promotions. This is in line with research conducted by Kyllonen (2013) which states that non-cognitive skills such as personality, motivation, and work attitude have a significant impact on a person's work performance and career opportunities.

In the modern world of work, companies increasingly demand employees who are not only productive, but also have high interpersonal skills. According to the World Economic Forum (2020), skills such as complex problem solving, critical

thinking, creativity, people management, and emotional intelligence are the most needed competencies in the future world of work. This condition indicates that soft skills are not only complementary, but also the main determinant of a person's career success. This is also relevant for Pamulang University working students who are preparing to compete in the labor market after graduating from college.

In this context, working students have a unique position. They not only learn theory in college, but also apply this knowledge in the world of work directly. This experience can strengthen their work competencies. However, without the support of good soft skills, such work experience may not fully have a positive impact on career development. Research by Lippman et al. (2015) shows that soft skills such as tenacity, adaptability, and self-confidence have a great contribution to individual career achievement, even greater than academic grades alone. In addition, in the context of higher education in Indonesia, efforts to develop soft skills still face various challenges. Many universities still focus on the curriculum on cognitive and academic aspects, while affective and psychomotor aspects have not been optimally integrated into the learning process. According to data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), more than 60% of university graduates in Indonesia have difficulty adapting to the world of work due to a lack of soft skills such as communication, leadership, and teamwork. This condition shows that there is a gap between the academic competencies taught on campus and the job skills needed by industry.

Based on these conditions, this research is relevant because it seeks to bridge the gap between the world of education and the needs of the world of work. By analyzing the role of soft skills in the relationship between work competencies and career opportunities of working students, it is hoped that this research can make a scientific contribution to the development of a more holistic and applicable educational model.

Career opportunities themselves describe the possibility of individuals to develop in their professional level, either through job promotions, increased responsibilities, and work mobility across fields. Greenhaus et al. (2010) explain that career opportunities are influenced by a person's ability to utilize his or her competencies and the extent to which he or she is able to build productive professional relationships. In this case, soft skills have an important role because they help individuals communicate effectively, negotiate, and build trust and social networks in the work environment (Arthur et al., 2005). The relationship between work competencies, soft skills, and career opportunities has been widely discussed in the literature, but research examining the mediating role of soft skills in these relationships is still limited, especially in the context of working students in Indonesia. Most previous studies have examined the direct relationship between work competence and performance, without considering the influence of soft skills as a reinforcing variable. This is where the research gap lies that this study aims to answer.

Empirically, this research is based on the real need to understand how working students can optimize their competencies and career opportunities through the mastery of soft skills. Many working students are academically accomplished but stagnant in their careers due to a lack of interpersonal skills, leadership, or

adaptability. This phenomenon shows that soft skills are not just a complement, but are the main foundation for career success in the modern era. In terms of education, the results of this research are expected to make a practical contribution to Pamulang University and other universities in developing a curriculum oriented to the needs of the world of work. Universities can design learning programs that integrate soft skills with hard skills through activities such as leadership training, work simulations, internships, and student organization activities. Meanwhile, from the theoretical side, this research contributes to enriching the study of the model of the relationship between work competencies, soft skills, and career opportunities, especially in the context of working students.

Theoretical Framework

1. Theoretical Foundations

a. Soft Work Skill Concept

Soft skills are a set of non-technical abilities related to personality, social behavior, communication, and interpersonal abilities that support a person's effectiveness at work (Robles, 2012). Soft skills include skills such as communication, teamwork, leadership, adaptability, and work ethic. In the context of the modern world of work, soft skills are an important element that distinguishes employees with similar technical abilities. According to Heckman and Kautz (2012), soft skills have a big role in determining career success, even their contribution can equal or exceed hard skills. Their research shows that characteristics such as perseverance, responsibility, honesty, and intrinsic motivation are directly related to a person's productivity and promotion opportunities. Therefore, the development of soft skills is not just a complement, but a long-term investment that increases the competitiveness of individuals in the job market.

The World Economic Forum (2020) identified that the most needed 21st century skills include complex problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, people management, and emotional intelligence. These skills are part of soft skills that allow individuals to remain relevant, adaptive, and productive in the midst of changing work environments. In the context of working students, skills such as effective communication, teamwork, and leadership are very important to manage the balance between academic and professional responsibilities (Suharyadi, 2020). Students who are able to manage their time, communicate effectively with colleagues and lecturers, and have a leadership spirit will have an easier time navigating the demands of these dual roles. Soft skills help them maintain academic performance without sacrificing professional responsibility. Thus, soft skills play a role as the main foundation in building sustainable work competencies.

b. Concept of Work Competency

Work competence is a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that a person needs to achieve effective work performance (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). This competency reflects a person's ability to carry out tasks according to the standards set by the organization or the industrial world. This means that individuals who have high competence will be able to complete work effectively, efficiently, and according

to organizational expectations. Work competence is also an objective measure of a person's performance and determines the extent to which the individual can contribute to the achievement of the company's goals. According to Wibowo (2016), work competence not only includes technical abilities but also reflects values, behaviors, and motivations that support individual success at work. In other words, work competencies are comprehensive, including cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects that interact with each other to produce optimal performance.

In the context of working students, work competencies are formed through academic and professional experiences at the same time. Work experience gained during the study period can enhance practical skills, while learning in college strengthens the foundation of knowledge and analysis. However, mastery of work competencies does not automatically guarantee career success without the support of good interpersonal skills and adaptability (Rahmawati & Santoso, 2021). This is due to the fact that many individuals are technically competent but fail to adapt in a dynamic work environment, especially when it comes to collaborating with various parties. Therefore, work competencies must be accompanied by the strengthening of soft skills so that individuals are able to apply their technical abilities effectively in complex social and professional situations. With

c. Career Opportunity Concept

Career opportunities describe the possibility of a person to develop in the career path, either vertically (promotion) and horizontally (expansion of responsibilities or job rotation). This concept is not only limited to the promotion of formal positions, but also includes the development of professional capacity, the expansion of the work network, and the increase in the value of individual market (employability). Career opportunities are a reflection of the extent to which individuals are able to utilize their potential and competencies to achieve progress in the world of work. According to Greenhaus et al. (2010), career opportunities are influenced by a variety of factors, including individual competencies, professional networks, and organizational environment. In the context of student workers, career opportunities are not only determined by technical or academic ability, but also by communication, leadership, and self-management skills. Students who actively develop themselves and expand their professional networks will have brighter career prospects than those who are passive or only focus on the academic aspect.

Research by Arthur et al. (2005) shows that individuals with high interpersonal skills are more likely to obtain career opportunities because they are able to build strong professional relationships and gain the trust of their superiors and colleagues. Thus, career opportunities are the result of the synergy between work competencies and interpersonal abilities which are reflected in soft skills. The two complement each other: work competencies provide a technical foundation, while soft skills open up access and strengthen social relationships that support career mobility. In the context of working students at Pamulang University, understanding this relationship is very important because they are in the early phase of career development that requires a balance between technical, academic, and social skills.

2. Intervariable Relationships

a. The Relationship between Job Competency and Career Opportunities

Work competence is the main factor that determines a person's readiness to face the challenges of the world of work and develop their career. Research by Sutrisno (2019) shows that employees with good work competencies have a greater chance of promotion and are more easily adjusted to organizational changes. High competence allows individuals to demonstrate superior performance, which ultimately increases the organization's confidence in their career potential.

b. The Relationship Between Soft Skills and Career Opportunities

Soft skills have a direct influence on a person's career opportunities. Robles' research (2012) found that communication skills, work ethic, and responsibility are the main determinants of career success in various industry sectors. Individuals with good soft skills are able to build harmonious working relationships, manage conflicts, and exhibit professional behavior, which is an added value in performance appraisals. In the context of working students, soft skills help them adapt to a complex work environment and maintain a balance between academic and professional responsibilities.

c. The Relationship Between Work Competencies and Soft Skills

Work competencies and soft skills have mutually supportive relationships. According to Lippman et al. (2015), soft skills strengthen the application of work competencies by improving individual abilities in communicating ideas, working together, and solving problems. Without good soft skills, a person's technical competencies are difficult to apply effectively in the work environment. On the other hand, strong soft skills accelerate competency development because it facilitates the process of learning, adaptation, and collaboration.

d. The Role of Soft Skill Mediation in the Relationship between Work Competency and Career Opportunities

Soft skills play a role as a mediating variable that strengthens the relationship between work competencies and career opportunities. Research by Kyllonen (2013) and Rahmawati & Santoso (2021) shows that individuals who have high work competence but are not accompanied by good interpersonal skills tend to experience stagnation in their careers. In contrast, individuals with high soft skills are able to highlight their competencies through effective communication, leadership, and confidence. This shows that soft skills are an important link between technical skills and career success.

3. Review of Previous Research

Various previous studies have examined the relationship between work competencies, soft skills, and career opportunities. For example:

1. Robles (2012) examined the role of soft skills in the world of work and found that communication, responsibility, and work ethics are the main determinants of professional success.
2. Heckman & Kautz (2012) affirm that soft skills have a long-term influence on an individual's economic and social success.

3. Rahmawati & Santoso (2021) examined the influence of work competence on career opportunities and found that work competence has a positive effect, but the influence becomes stronger if it is accompanied by good soft skills.
4. Kyllonen (2013) shows that non-cognitive skills such as motivation, personality, and work ethics play a major role in determining work performance and career mobility.
5. Lippman et al. (2015) state that soft skills, especially adaptability and confidence, determine career success more than academic achievement alone.

4. Research Gap

Based on a literature review, most previous research has only examined the direct relationship between work competencies and career opportunities, or between soft skills and work performance, without explaining how soft skills play a role as a variable that strengthens the relationship between the two. In addition, most of the research was conducted in the context of professional employees, rather than on working students who faced dual challenges in education and employment. Therefore, this research has novelty by examining the role of soft skill mediation in the relationship between work competencies and career opportunities of working students at Pamulang University

Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with a path analysis method. The quantitative approach was chosen because this study aims to test the influence between variables that can be measured using numbers and statistically analyzed.

Path analysis is used to determine the direct or indirect influence of work competencies (X1) on career opportunities (Y) through soft work skills (X2).

Population: all students of Pamulang University who have the status of active working students in the current academic year.

Sample: a portion of the population that meets the criteria as a study respondent.

Sampling technique: using purposive sampling, which is the selection of samples based on certain considerations, with the following criteria.

1. Active students of Pamulang University.
2. Work (permanent or part-time) for at least 6 months.
3. Willing to fill out a research questionnaire.

Location: Pamulang University, South Tangerang.

Time: The study was conducted for 2 weeks, including the preparation stage, questionnaire distribution, data collection, and analysis of results.

The analysis was conducted using SPSS or SmartPLS, including:

Descriptive statistics

Validity and reliability testing

Multiple linear regression/path analysis

Sobel test (mediation).

Data Collection Procedures

Distribution of online questionnaires through platforms such as Google Forms.

Announcements were made through social media and student groups to increase participation

1. Uji Analisis Regresi Sederhana (Kompetensi Kerja → Peluang Karir)

Model	Coefficients ^a			t	Sig.
	B	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	1.349	.366	3.681	.000
	Kompetensi Kerja	.784	.053	.829	14.908

a. Dependent Variable: Peluang Karir

Berdasarkan hasil uji regresi sederhana pada tabel *Coefficients*, diperoleh nilai koefisien regresi Kompetensi Kerja sebesar $B = 0,784$ dengan nilai $t = 14,908$ dan signifikansi $0,000 (< 0,05)$. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa Kompetensi Kerja berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap Peluang Karir.

2. Uji Koefisien Determinasi X1 (Kompetensi Kerja)

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.829 ^a	.688	.684	1.42099

a. Predictors: (Constant), Kompetensi Kerja

Berdasarkan tabel Model Summary, nilai $R^2 = 0,688$ yang berarti bahwa Kompetensi Kerja mampu menjelaskan variabel Peluang Karir sebesar 68,8%, sedangkan sisanya dipengaruhi oleh faktor lain yang tidak diteliti dalam penelitian ini.

Nilai R yang tinggi menunjukkan hubungan yang kuat antara Kompetensi Kerja dan Peluang Karir.

3. Uji Analisis Regresi Sederhana (Soft Skill Kerja → Peluang Karir)

Model	Coefficients ^a			t	Sig.
	B	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	.801	.360	2.222	.029
	Soft Skill Kerja	.717	.043	.856	16.642

a. Dependent Variable: Peluang Karir

Pada tabel Coefficients, variabel Soft Skill memiliki nilai koefisien regresi sebesar $0,717$ dengan nilai signifikansi $0,000 < 0,05$. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa Soft Skill berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap

Peluang Karir. Artinya, semakin baik soft skill yang dimiliki mahasiswa pekerja, maka peluang karir mereka juga meningkat secara signifikan.

4. Uji Koefisien Determinasi X2 (Soft Skill Kerja)

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.856 ^a	.733	.730	1.31413

a. Predictors: (Constant), Soft Skill Kerja

Nilai R Square = 0,733 menunjukkan bahwa Soft Skill mampu menjelaskan Peluang Karir sebesar 73,3%. Angka ini menunjukkan pengaruh yang kuat dan signifikan, sehingga soft skill memiliki peranan penting dalam peningkatan peluang karir mahasiswa pekerja.

5. Uji Analisis Regresi Berganda (X1 dan X2 → Peluang Karir)

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	.675	.345	1.956	.053
	Kompetensi Kerja	.323	.096	.342	.001
	Soft Skill Kerja	.466	.085	.557	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Peluang Karir

Hasil regresi berganda menunjukkan bahwa:

Kompetensi Kerja memiliki nilai B = 0,323, Sig = 0,001

Soft Skill memiliki nilai B = 0,466, Sig = 0,000

Keduanya memiliki nilai signifikansi < 0,05 sehingga dapat disimpulkan bahwa Kompetensi Kerja dan Soft Skill berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap Peluang Karir secara simultan. Variabel yang paling dominan adalah Soft Skill karena memiliki koefisien beta yang lebih besar.

6. Uji Koefisien Determinasi (X1 dan X2 Bersama-sama)

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.872 ^a	.760	.755	1.25117

a. Predictors: (Constant), Soft Skill Kerja, Kompetensi Kerja

Nilai R Square = 0,760, artinya Kompetensi Kerja dan Soft Skill secara bersama-sama mampu menjelaskan Peluang Karir sebesar 76%.

Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa kedua variabel bebas memiliki peranan yang sangat besar dalam membentuk peluang karir mahasiswa pekerja.

7. Uji t (Pengaruh Parsial)

Model	Coefficients ^a			t	Sig.
	B	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		
1	(Constant)	.675	.345	1.956	.053
	Kompetensi Kerja	.323	.096	.342	3.379 .001
	Soft Skill Kerja	.466	.085	.557	5.502 .000

a. Dependent Variable: Peluang Karir

Pada tabel Coefficients:

Kompetensi Kerja memiliki nilai $t = 3,379$ dengan $Sig = 0,001 < 0,05$.

→ maka Kompetensi Kerja berpengaruh signifikan secara parsial terhadap Peluang Karir.

Soft Skill memiliki nilai $t = 5,502$ dengan $Sig = 0,000 < 0,05$.

→ maka Soft Skill juga berpengaruh signifikan secara parsial.

Soft Skill memiliki nilai t lebih besar sehingga merupakan variabel yang paling dominan.

8. Uji F (Pengaruh Simultan)

Model	ANOVA ^a				
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	496.137	2	248.069	158.467 .000 ^b
	Residual	156.542	100	1.565	
	Total	652.680	102		

a. Dependent Variable: Peluang Karir

b. Predictors: (Constant), Soft Skill Kerja, Kompetensi Kerja

Pada tabel ANOVA, nilai $F = 158,467$ dengan signifikansi $0,000 < 0,05$.

Artinya, Kompetensi Kerja dan Soft Skill secara simultan berpengaruh signifikan terhadap Peluang Karir. Model regresi yang digunakan dinyatakan layak untuk digunakan dalam penelitian.

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