



A Model for Developing Soft Skills among Education Students towards Success as Teachers

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Abstract: Kenya now has a growing number of private universities offering various degrees, including education. This suggests a large outflow of graduates into the highly competitive job market. In response, private universities have adopted the soft skills demanded by employers to give graduates an edge over other universities. Soft skills clearly increase employability in the labor market. The present study was conducted in four targeted Western private sponsored universities offering education program. Target population was education students and lectures. Concurrent mixed-methods research design was employed. Based on the findings and reviewed literature, a model of soft skills development was proposed for use. The study recommends that lecturers in Schools of education should use the model developed to develop soft skills among learners during teaching and learning process.

Keywords: *Soft skills, Hard skills, Model, Education Students, Graduates, Employability.*

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1. Introduction

Soft skills are so important that they are often the reason employers decide whether to keep or promote an employee. (Rabah, 2015). Vathanophas and Thai-ngam (2007), while arguing in favor of the need for a national public sector management reform plan, emphasized the urgency for a corresponding human resource capital which comprises the attributes of trustworthiness, integrity, courage, accountability and vision in a work environment. Likewise, Bertolin and Leite (2008), recommended an urgent need for the appropriate educational reform to prepare better the undergraduates or students in order to meet the demands of citizenship skills and careers in response to the job market dynamics. Rios et al. (2020) also summarized the critical role of soft skills in the workplace environment and concluded that no longer is the recollection of facts or terminologies from textbooks adequate enough for other cognitive skills. A deeper demonstration of the understanding through planning, use of evidence and abstract reasoning is more demanding.

This approach, according to the author, demands extended thinking and higher cognitive skills which can be harnessed through an effective educational curriculum and program.

Ngang (2011), on the subject matter, has however observed that the incorporation of soft skills in the training of the personnel in the respective educational institutions and the inculcation of the same in the subsequent learning institutions, has been hampered partly by lack of respective and specific expertise in the personnel training and yet arguably, it is in the inculcation of such soft skills in the training curriculum and pedagogy that can be termed as the central pillars of the educational processes hopefully, towards the aspired, sustainable development. The above author further affirms that transferable skills, e.g. communicative skills, ethics and professionalism, teamwork and dynamics and leadership skills to name but a few, have great influence on the employment aspects of youth and evidently according to this author, youths who understand transferable skills training program were about 12% more likely to be employed as compared to those who didn't.

In reference to studies done in Vietnam, Truong et al. (2018) concluded that soft skills are critical to a developing economy and hence argued for the crucial need for Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) to equip learners with appropriate educational skills and knowledge in conformity with the inescapable and yet rapidly changing socio-economic factors coupled with the parallel skill competitions in a modern economy. Paraphrasing a statement of Obama (2011) in his back-to-school speech, there is a need to set a clear goal. Every Student should graduate from high school ready for college and career. A career in this case is influenced significantly by soft skills regardless of race, ethnic or language background, or disability status (“Blueprint for reform,” 2010).

The World Conference on Higher Education (1998), observed that an ideal educational curriculum and its respective pedagogic strategies is expected to educate and train students to become well informed and deeply motivated citizens who can think critically, analyze problems of society and apply the skills albeit the prevailing social responsibilities. Bosire and Amimo (2017), arguing in favor of the curriculum change, added their voices concluding that today’s pedagogical practices at our universities are short of those much-needed skills. And lacks originality and creativity.

This study collected data on how lecturers in school of education private universities in Western Kenya embed soft skills among education students during teaching and learning process.

The study purpose is to answer the questions: What is the best practice of developing soft skills among education students towards success as teachers?

2. Literature Review

Models of Soft Skills’ Development

There are, however, three universally acceptable alternatives to the development of soft skills for educational institutions. Ngang (2011) defines the three namely: The stand-alone model, embedded model and a combination of the two models. The following paragraphs provide the scope of the models, observation and limitations.

The Stand-Alone Model

This is a process of training and providing opportunities to students to develop soft skills through specific courses that are carefully tailored for this purpose e.g., English language, Islamic civilization, entrepreneurship, and elective courses such as public speaking and critical

thinking. These programs are often part of the overall requirements of learning and the number of courses and credits applicable in each category depends on the specific curriculum design and the overall requirements of the program. Students are encouraged to sign up for several additional courses which can be accumulated into a minor course. However, this kind of approach will require an increase in the number of credits and time spent on each particular program.

The Embedded Model

The embedded approach incorporates the soft skills in the teaching and learning activities across the curriculum, hence there is no specific subject course of study in the defined area. Students are trained to master the soft skills through various formal teaching and learning activities that are planned and carried out using specific strategies and methods to attain the outcomes of the respective course. This is to indicate that the suggested model involves and incorporation of the soft skills within the teaching program where each element of soft skills is spelt out in the learning outcome and then translated into the instructional plan for the period of learning under reference. Several teaching and learning activities such as questioning, classroom discussion, brainstorming, teamwork presentation, role play and simulation, task/project, fieldwork and sight visits are incorporated in this approach.

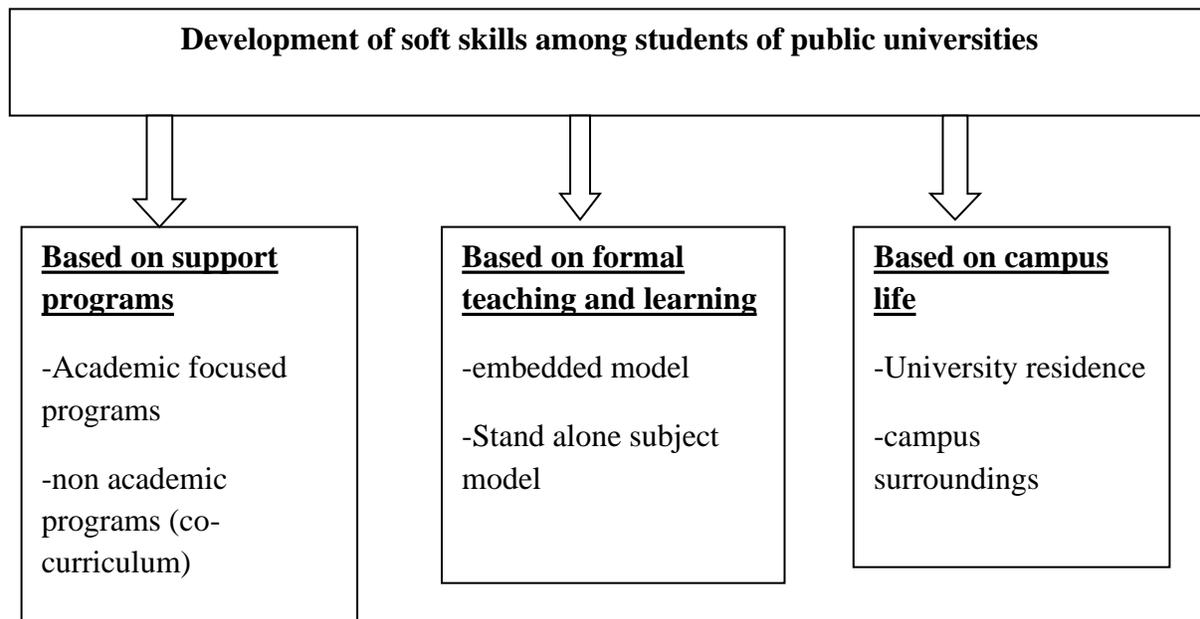
In general, the development of soft skills in pedagogy using an embedded model involves the expertise of the lecturers in using their various teaching strategies and methods that are totally student centered. Both teachers and students are expected to be actively involved in this interactive process.

Combination of Stand-alone Subject Model and the Embedded Model

This model attempts to incorporate the better side of each of the two methods indicated above. It requires teachers to master specific teaching and learning skills and apply them accordingly. This model is more effective in developing and acquiring the soft skills because it involves an integration of both elements of approach.

Overall, considering the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, the higher education institutions are encouraged to use the embedded model as compared to the stand-alone model. This is because the embedded model focuses on student-centered learning, such as experiential learning, problem-based learning, and gives students practical experience as well. In 2006, he Malaysian Institute of Higher Learning, based on some pertinent research studies, made a recommendation on a framework to be adopted by

the universities in regard to jobs skills development (Tang et al., 2015). The figure below describes the model:



(Source: Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2006; in Tang et al., 2015)

Figure 1: Development of soft skills among students of public universities

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed the concurrent mixed-methods research design, specifically descriptive-comparative design. This involves the collection, analysis and integration of quantitative and qualitative data, which were gathered independent of each other but roughly the same period. The qualitative data originated from the oral interviews and documentary analysis while quantitative data came from the questionnaires administered both education lecturers and students of education undergoing their teaching practice.

The term “mixed methods” defines the systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative research methods which generate the synergy that translates into more elucidated research findings. The qualitative data obtained by use of oral interviews, an extract from documentary analysis that supports the analyzed quantitative data acquired through quantitative methods (questionnaires

approach with ratings). This process eventually translated into the exhaustive utilization of both data sources as opposed to separate individual quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis.

A survey is a list of items in a questionnaire or interviews that aim at extracting specific information from a group of people. In this context, the researcher used the available documentary records from the lecturers, questionnaires and oral interviews to obtain information on soft skills’ application from lecturers, students and employers (secondary school administrators).

The qualitative data was obtained from lecturers and the documentary analysis from available official government guidelines for university education i. e. the universities standards and guidelines (Commission for University Education, 2014), syllabus, course outline, lesson notes, and the teaching practice assessment tools. Further qualitative information was obtained from the open-ended section of the questionnaire administered to both education lecturers and the education students under study. The respective secondary school administrators (employers)

were also given an opportunity to express their views on soft skills application by the teaching practice students attached to them.

The questionnaire section focused on four selected areas of soft skills: Communicative, professionalism and ethics, teamwork dynamics and leadership skills. There is also an open-ended question enabling lecturers and students to share their creativity and innovation on the subject matter and even gave examples of such skills.

Population

The researcher purposively sampled four privately sponsored universities in the western region of Kenya: University A in Nandi County, University B in Nakuru County, University C in Trans-Nzoia County, and University D in Kisumu County. The four universities are statistically manageable. All the universities are in western region of Kenya which is the West of Rift Valley. University A is approximately 320 kilometers from Nairobi, located near Kapsabet town in Nandi County. University B is approximately 10 kilometers west of Nakuru town in Nakuru County and approximately 167 kilometers North West of Nairobi city. University C is in Trans-Nzoia County which its headquarters is Kitale town. The campus is 390 kilometers North West of Nairobi city. University D is situated in the lakeside city of Kisumu and is approximately 450 kilometers west of Nairobi city.

Currently in Kenya (2019), there are a total of 31 accredited public universities and 18 private ones. A further observation confirms that an additional 14 have also been issued with letters of interim authority, 6 public constituent colleges and 5 private constituent colleges in Kenya add up to the list of such institutions of higher learning.

The researcher used the cluster sampling technique for teaching practice students only. The researcher clustered the teaching practice students into their respective universities for their training. Hence, there were four clusters in the field with respect to the targeted universities. In each cluster, 30% of the students preparing to participate in teaching practice in various schools were sampled to participate in the study (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). There was a total of 635 education students preparing for teaching practice. The total sample size was 199, this represents 30% of the education students. Additionally, the researcher used purposive sampling to sample all lecturers in school of education in the various targeted universities. A total of 41 lecturers participated in the study in response to the three instruments namely: Questionnaire and interview protocol. Moreover, 4 teaching practice coordinators at the university level also purposively participated in the study, because each university had one

teaching practice coordinator. Furthermore, 8 secondary school administrators (employers) were purposively chosen to participate in the study, specifically the interview part. These school administrators represent employers through their principals; they also receive teaching students from targeted private universities.

Research Instruments

This research utilized three research instruments. One is a researcher-developed questionnaire and secondly, the oral interview guide involving university lecturers and school principals. Thirdly, documentary analysis guide was used to analyze the curriculum materials currently in use. The research questionnaire with both closed and open-ended items was administered to the lecturers and students. The closed-ended questions were rated on a modified Likert scale (four-point) as follows: strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

Reliability

Reliability is the degree to which a selected assessment tool for the research study produces stable and consistent results in a research project. Before the actual data collection, the researcher established the reliability of the questionnaire by doing a pilot study, which was conducted in a private university outside the western Kenya region, which is not part of the study. The pilot sample size should be higher in number than the number of items, however, the threshold should be between 30 -50 participants. To choose the higher size, there were 45 participants in the pilot study. Pilot study was conducted in a university located in Kericho town, which is 270 kilometers west of Nairobi city. The university offers education programs especially in arts. The data gathered from the pilot study was used to compute the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of each sub-section of the questionnaire. The cut-off point for the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was set at 0.60.

Data Gathering Procedures

Prior to pilot studies and main data collection, the researcher sought permission and clearance from the Institution's Research Ethics Committee and the Director of Graduate Studies of the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton. The Research Ethics Committee members subsequently studied the proposal and once satisfied advised the Director of Graduate Studies to release a pilot study letter of clearance to the researcher to undertake the research exercise. Upon the completion of the pilot study, the researcher presented the reliability analysis to the supervisors and Graduate Studies and Research Director for approval and subsequent grant of authority to the

researcher to proceed with the next phase of the main data collection.

After completion of the pilot study, the researcher submitted a copy of the approved proposal to the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation in Nairobi which studied the same for issuance of a letter of authority for the research to begin anywhere within the boundaries of the Republic of Kenya. With an introduction letter from the University seeking authority to conduct the research and the specific details of the information and material assistance thereof from the university and all the concerned personnel, the researcher, also armed with the government authority letter, the proposed interview schedule, interview protocol for the concerned education lecturers, the student questionnaire sample, lecturer questionnaire sample, school administrators sample, documentary analysis sample began the research process with a pilot study in a private university outside the four selected universities before focusing on the targeted universities.

The administrative leadership of the university under reference guided the researcher to the School Dean who subsequently directed the researcher to specific departments involved in this study. This included head of the respective departments; lecturers and the education trainee students due for teaching practice. The department chair or whoever is concerned further assisted with the teaching guidelines, logistics of identifying the schedules of the meetings with the concerned lecturers, the teaching practice students and the program of the respective research field exercises. This process included specifically introducing the researcher to the participating lecturers, students, and any other relevant institutional personnel.

After the student's response to the questionnaire, the researcher dedicated time to collect samples of the teaching records, administer the lecturers' questionnaire and undertake the interview/focus group discussion with them. During this focus group discussion (using interview protocol guide in appendices), the researcher recorded the appropriate responses using a voice recorder as much as taking notes. The students and the lecturers responded to their questionnaires accordingly and submitted the same back to the researcher within the same day. All the

information collected was compiled and securely kept for future analysis. To acquire data from the secondary school administrators, the researcher interviewed them using a prepared interview protocol and recorded all the proceedings during the interview for the purpose of thematic analysis. The same methodology described was replicated in all the four selected universities.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The data was coded into the MS excel and henceforth subjected to some data cleaning process. Any irrelevant information obtained in the course of the research study was discarded. Data from Excel was transported to the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28, which was used to do the analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

Model of Soft Skills Development among Education Students in Private Universities

The objective of this study was to develop a model for soft skills development. Soft skills are critical aspects of education students. The skills are developed by education lecturers during teaching and learning process in the classroom. There are models in the literature which provide effective models of soft skills development in various departments, however, education students are not well covered by the existing models. Employers consider soft skills as the most important skill above the hard skills; hence its development and implementation are key to producing employable graduates. This study attempted to find out whether lecturers in school of education develop soft skills among learners and how are the skills embedded in their education courses curriculum with an aim of using this information to develop a model for soft skills development among learners at university level. The researcher consulted available literature and referred to the findings of the study to come up with perceived effective model for development of soft skills. Figure 1 shows the developed model.

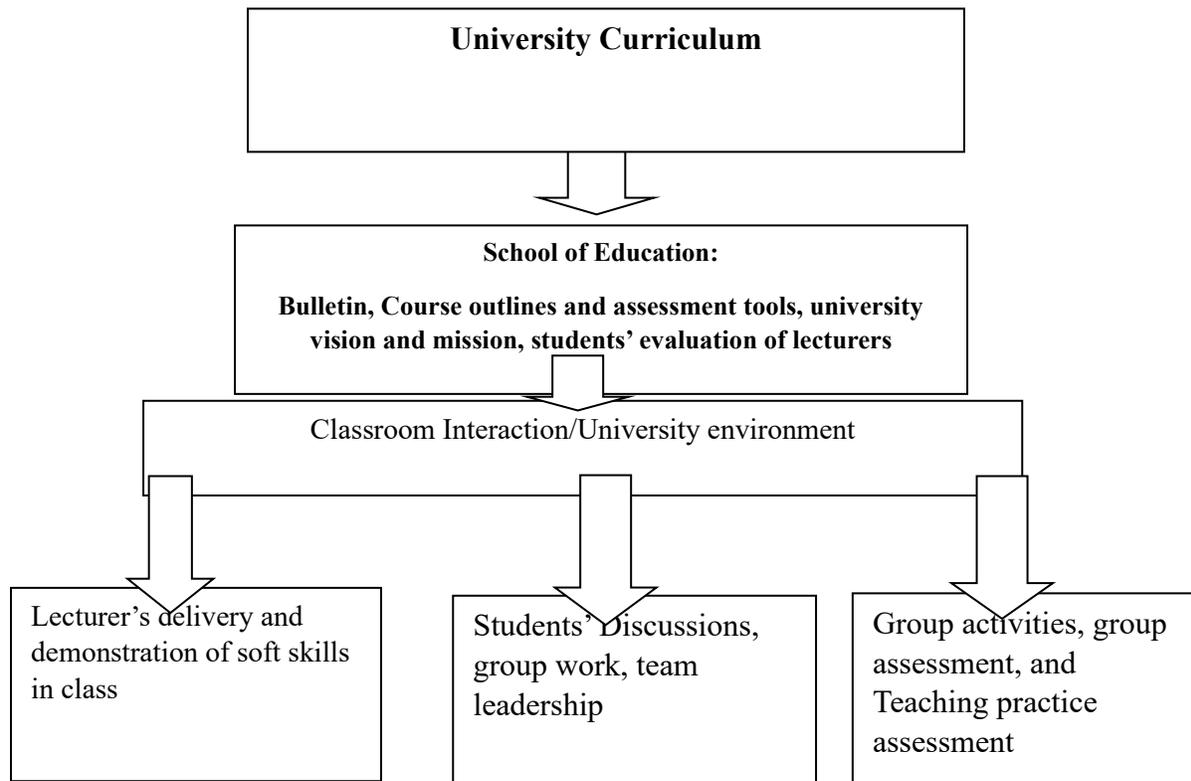


Figure 2: Model for Development of Soft Skills among Education Students

Source, Researcher

The model for development of soft skills among education students is presented in figure 2 above. The model was developed based on the findings of the study and literature review; hence it is a hybrid of the reviewed literature and the findings of the study. This study focused only on schools of education, where respondents were lecturers and education students. The findings suggested that course outlines, bulletin description of courses form the bases for embedment of soft skills in education curriculum and this is main reason as to why it is indicated in the model. The implementers are lecturers in schools of education who demonstrate in class during interaction with the students. The inclusion of lecturers as implementers is because of the findings which revealed that lecturers rated strongly agreed that they develop soft skills during teaching and learning process. In response students also agreed that their lecturers develop soft skills during the teaching and learning process. The interaction occurs in terms of demonstration of soft skills in class such as minding the tone when communicating, demonstrating ethics and professionalism during classroom interaction. Lecturers organize students in groups, for discussion, and group activities. It is from this assignment that students develop skills such as leadership skills and teamwork dynamics. Group activities which are assessed and awarded marks as a group help student to develop soft skills such as understating that each student has a critical role in the

group. During analysis of data, the output clearly shows that students agreed that their lecturers develop soft skills during teaching and learning process mainly and not in other areas such as curriculum activities. The rating was very high and both education lecturers and students agreed. Hence, there was an urgent need to include in the model the education lecturers as the implementers. The findings of the study did not reveal any other implementer.

Lepeley et al. (2016) argue that the content and teaching methods currently in universities could be overemphasized core techniques, the so-called hard skills and underestimated employers' favorite, soft skills, resulting in an emphasis on rules-based learning rather than principle-based content. This has necessitated the fact that a formal model for development of underscored soft skills must be developed.

According to England, Nagel and Salter (2020) managerial staff in various working stations are currently emphasizing the importance of soft skills to employee success. Classrooms in universities and colleges offer an active learning approach to collaboratively teach students the fundamental soft skills needed in most jobs. Although there is an initial cost for lecturers at first, this initiative quickly yields significant results for students. In researcher's approach, the need for soft skills stems from real-world

problems arising from the application of technical skills in the field. A decision should be made to require students to learn soft skills. Finally, students apply their soft skills in the real world, hence the need to develop soft skills.

Amimo (2012) more than a decade ago observed that the current workplace, emphasis is mainly on soft skills, a trend that higher institutions may not be aware of. The study focused on the desire for design rather than mass production, which was characteristic of the conventional workplace, and it illustrates the new patterns in university structures with an emphasis on personalization and globalization. In addition, the study posits that the challenges to higher education in terms of academic screening, curricular specialization, and the foundation of education and schooling remain a challenge in higher education system, along with implications for individual employees. There is a shifting demand which may require a model such as the one developed in this study to tailor in the soft skills development rather than mass production for mass unemployment.

Additionally, Suryanti and Supeni (2019) observe that improved students' soft skills through problem-based learning in educational science courses in preparation for higher personal competence is a necessity. The researchers collected data via interviews, observations, documentation and testing methods similar to the present studies strategy of data collection. Data validity was determined by method triangulation, source triangulation, and observation persistence. Analyzing data using qualitative analysis. As a result, problem-based courses in education improve students' soft skills, including aspects such as self-confidence, self-confidence, adaptability, critical thinking, organizational awareness, attitudes, initiative, empathy, integrity, self-discipline, leadership, and problem awareness. has been shown to be possible. The researchers use the same information to develop a model for soft skills improvement among students.

Furthermore, Ngang (2015) extensively and identified key issues in soft skills development through apprenticeship training. Ngang (2015) collected through in-depth interviews with two of the educators during 15 years of professional experience at public universities in Malaysia. The researcher then analyzed the data obtained from the interviews according to three main themes: soft her skills and important themes that were needed was emphasized. The study findings depicted almost similar findings of the presents study that large class sizes, academic orientation, and inadequate training duration were factors that contribute to failures in soft skills development. However, the study did not develop a model for soft skills development. A problem the present study has attempted to solve by developing a model for soft skills implementation.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The model for implementation of soft skills developed by the researcher should be the ideal one for development of soft skills among education students.

The study recommends that lecturers in Schools of education should use the model developed to develop soft skills among learners during teaching and learning process.

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