

## IMPROVING SOFT SKILLS FOR STUDENTS AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS & BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION- THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY

Dao Thuy Hang

*Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration, TNU*

**ABSTRACT:** International economic integration and Industrial Revolution 4.0 bring many opportunities and challenges to almost every area of industry. This situation makes the workforce have essential skills such as brainstorming, creativity, analysis, synthesis, foreign languages, information technology, etc. Soft skills training for students is necessary which is paid special attention to improve the quality of training so that it can meet the requirements of the labor market. The article mentions some concepts related to soft skills, roles and measures to improve the effectiveness of soft skills training for students at the University of Economics and Business Administration - Thai Nguyen University.

**Keywords:** *skills, soft skills, training, students, TUEBA*

### I. Introduction

Thai Nguyen University of Economics and Business Administration, (TUEBA) was established according to the Prime Minister's decision 136/2004/QĐ-TTĐ, issued on August 2, 2004, with the aim of restructuring institutions that train economics, management and business administration in Thai Nguyen University. The organizational structure of the University includes the teaching staff, the university leaders (the Principals and the Vice Principals), 08 functional departments, 07 specialized faculties, 06 institutes, and other organizations. In June 2021, the total number of staff of the university was 375 people, among which there are 280 lecturers including 08 associate professors, 87 doctors and 185 masters. Currently, the University of Economics and Business Administration offers training programs at all three levels: undergraduate, master and doctor, with 02 majors in doctoral, 04 majors in master and 7 sections with 27 undergraduate training programs. In addition, the university also organizes international joint training programs with many partners such as China, the Philippines, Korea... By June 2021 the university had trained 36 postgraduate, 1,009 graduate and 6,535 undergraduate students of all systems. Over the years, the University of Economics and Business Administration has gradually grown in its popularities, asserted its prestige, and played an important part in Thai Nguyen University and the region in the field of training, scientific research, technology transfer, international cooperation... It has gained many achievements such as the constantly increasing training scale, especially training high-level resources for masters and doctorates. Many of its scientific research works have been transferred and applied effectively to reality to make socio-economic developments. It is also a bright spot in the international cooperation of Thai Nguyen University.

In recent years, together with the growth in the scale and number of university training programs, there has been a rapid increase in the number of highly qualified human resources. However, there is still a problem that the training only focuses on providing knowledge, not paying enough attention to forging professional skills, especially soft skills. As a result, many students lack skills like communication, teamwork, and persuasion.... They find it difficult to adapt and respond to changes in their professions and the labor market. Therefore, it is necessary for lecturers to improve the quality of soft skills training provided to their students. This also helps the university's training quality improve.

### II. The situation of soft skills training for students at University of Economics and Business Administration - Thai Nguyen University

#### 2.1. Related Literature

To provide the general knowledge for researching content, the author uses the following concepts:

**Skills:** There are many concepts of skills in terms of the technical aspect of the action or its ability to express the result of the action. However, most of the authors believe that skills are the product of the thinking process and accumulated experience in practical activities. In other words, skills are the abilities to use knowledge and means of acting flexibly, creatively, and in accordance with the changing circumstances in reality. When the situations change, the operations and orders to them must also act accordingly. Skills are always associated with a specific activity in different fields. From all mentioned above, the author suggested using the concept: *Skill is a form of human action that creatively applies knowledge, experience, and action to practical activities in different conditions and specific circumstances to solve them effectively according to the purpose or criteria set before.*

**Life skills:** A system of basic skills that help individuals survive and adapt in life; These skills help individuals express themselves as well as create the necessary internal strength to adapt and thrive in different conditions of life.

**Hard skills:** Fundamental skills which are trained officially in schools, colleges.... Hard skills are built gradually from low levels to higher levels, through the systematic process of teaching, self-study, practice, and practical activities. Hard skills often appear on résumés about each person's educational ability, experience, and professional expertise. Thus, hard skills are professional skills that show education or qualifications and certificates, experience, and professional proficiency through each person's behavior and actions.

**Soft skills:** Important skills which show lifestyle, knowledge, and experience enrichment. They are considered golden keys to success for each person and can be obtained from real-life and professional activities. They can be related to people's emotional intelligence (EQ) index. Soft skills are abilities to make one's behaviors change to follow the positive standard and to manage the needs and challenges of life effectively. They are collections of basic skills that are voluntarily implemented based on job knowledge, social integration ability, attitude, and behavior, or interactions with the surroundings such as society, community, friends, and colleagues... to maximize work efficiency and success.

## **2.2. Current situation of soft skill training at TUEBA**

Currently, there is hardly any module on soft skills training in the training programs of the current education system. Therefore, the training output standards have not met the requirements of the employers, enterprises, and companies... As a result, the job opportunities for new graduate students are rather limited. Besides, short-term training activities on soft skills for students are optional within the university. In fact, soft skills training for students can be delivered via community activities. Currently, TUEBA has many student unions and clubs creating a good environment for students to practice their soft skills such as group management, presentation, and communication skills. Moreover, the university also organizes annual extra-curricular activities, scientific research, and start-up ... which can also contribute to improving student soft skills.

Current soft skills teaching activities of the university are mainly integrated from cultural forums, arts, and sports, civic activity week, and team clubs.... They can also be integrated into lessons, lectures, and apprentices. They can be gained from visiting experts teaching on thematic topics, too. However, they contain too much theory, and not many chances for students to apply in practice...

The demand to provide students with soft skills is really big. The students also need to be trained properly to experience and have sufficient soft skills for their own improvement and professional development after graduation.

At present, there are not any departments specialized in skills training for students, this is a big problem affecting skill teaching activities.

### **2.2.1. Students' feedback on the soft skill training activities of the university.**

In order to have a good objective comprehensive overview of soft skills training for students, it is necessary to evaluate not only the content and form of soft skills training but also the student feedback. Through integrated subjects and activities on soft skills training, the students' evaluation of their soft skills training activities was only at an average level and the percentage of students who felt satisfied was not very high. Specifically, the results of Figure 1 show that 39.4 % of the students surveyed rate the teaching of other subjects supporting soft skills in class at a good level. The organization of extracurricular activities to improve soft skills is assessed as average with 56.4 %. Volunteer activities are rated good with 36.6 % and very good with 16.52 % of the students asked. They believed that volunteer activities had been well-organized and met the needs of improving student soft skills.

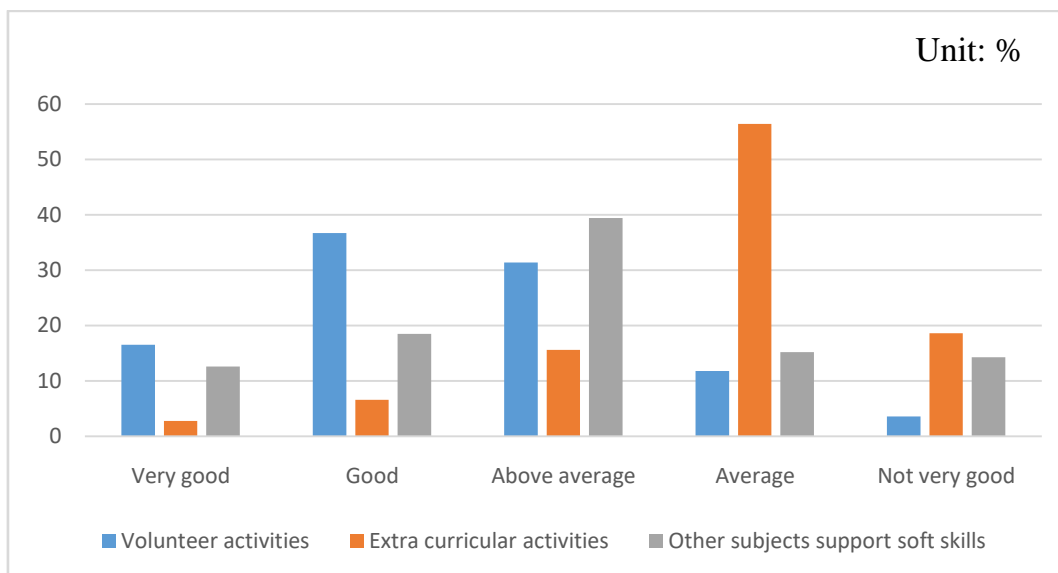


Figure 1: Student's assessment of the university's soft skill training for students (Source: Author's survey data, 2021)

The percentage of students who rate the above activities as good and very good is really low (mostly less than 15% of the students surveyed, except for volunteer activities, associations are rated very good, accounting for 16,52 %). Meanwhile, the percentage of students who do not give a good assessment for soft skills training at the university still accounts for a high proportion. This can be inferred that these activities have not been implemented effectively. That is why many students do not find them interesting to participate.

Therefore, skill training activities and extracurricular activities to improve student soft skills are not only insufficient but also ineffective, so they need to be focused. In order to have good results, teaching and training them must need time, finance, effort, and the cooperation of all other relevant factors.

**2.2.2. The demand for student soft skills training in the university**

**The form of training**

There were 96.56 % of the students participating in the survey answered "yes" and only 3.44 % of the students answered "no" when asked about "Should the school add more activities?" soft skills training into university training programs?"

With the expectations of students about the form of soft skills training in Figure 2, it is shown that in the coming time, the university needs to regularly organize short-term intensive courses on soft skills for students and require the lecturers to integrate more of them into professional courses.

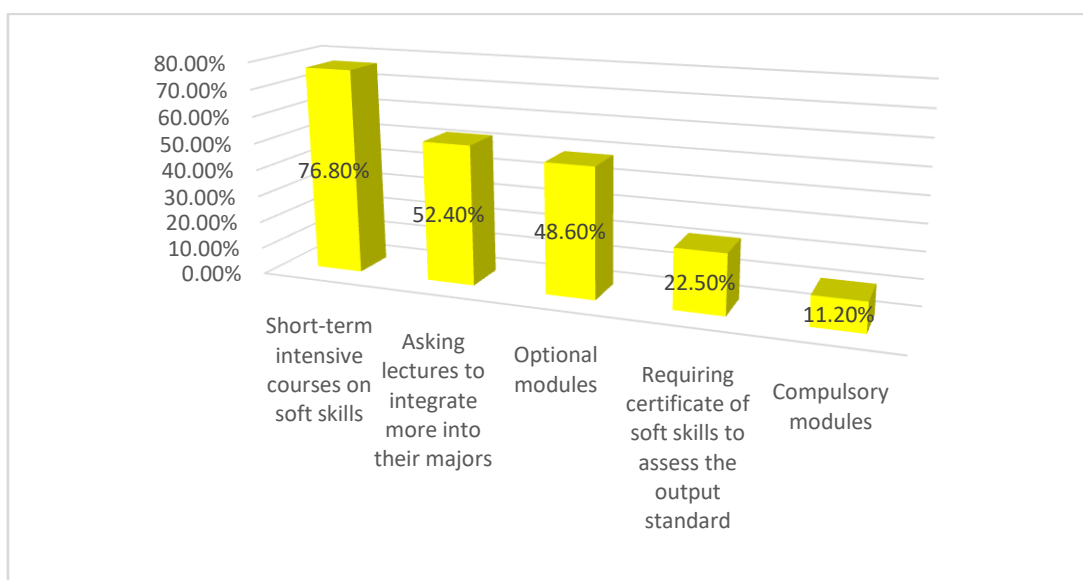


Figure 2: Students' desire for soft skills training (Source: Author's own survey data, 2021)

**About the training content:**

Table 1 shows that most students desire to be equipped with all the soft skills offered by the research team. Among them, communication skills, presentation, and teamwork are mainly chosen. The students also want to learn a new skill. It is a job interview.

(Source: Author's survey data, 2021)

The first and second-year students (K17 and K16) tend to select communication skills, presentation, teamwork, study, and self-study, while the third and fourth year students tend to prefer job interview skills and time management skills. Thus, the soft skills that students want to learn stem from their experiences, actual needs in

TT	Skill	Total		By key (%)		
		Quantity	Ratio (%)	K15	K16	K17
	<b>All school</b>	<b>3,593</b>		<b>985</b>	<b>1,008</b>	<b>1,600</b>
1	Presentation skills	2881	80.19	67.7	83.54	87.35
2	Teamwork skill	2202	76.42	66.48	73.92	82.54
3	Job interview skills	1129	51.26	91.33	14.31	0
4	Time management skills	745	66.04	74.97	52.77	47.92
5	Communication skills	530	71.07	59.21	75.85	76.77
6	Study and self-study skills	295	55.66	26.48	75.25	81.58
7	Negotiation skills	141	47.8	71.94	23.92	11.38
8	Planning and organizing skills	72	51.26	54.36	60.46	31.58
9	Problem-solving skills	34	47.17	65.88	33.54	14.27
10	Other skills	4	12.26	9.52	10.46	10.5

the learning process, and their awareness of learning demands. The necessity of soft skills for the studying process at university and in the workplace is not paid much attention to.

### III. Some suggested solutions

To improve the effectiveness of soft skills training for students, lecturers need to use integrated methods depending on the contents, conditions, and situations of the university and students. This is the way to organize soft skills training activities to equip the students with soft skills from low level to higher one so that they can be better and better. In this study, the author proposes the following measures:

- Surveying graduate students, businesses, and employers to find out the changes and requirements of the labor market, from which adjustments in the training programs and output standards can be made. In addition, the Training Department of the university needs to issue specific guidelines on how to integrate soft skills training into lectures given to students of all majors of the university.
- Building a team of lecturers and instructors to practice soft skills training modules. At the same time, soft skills are added to the university's training activities in professional training, integrated discussions, and intensive training courses on soft skills. The content should focus on the goals: helping students realize the importance of soft skills and identify which of these skills can cause them difficulties; Enabling students to self-practice, self-study, and master soft skills during their university time.
- Encouraging lecturers to regularly update teaching methods so that students can gain both professional knowledge and soft skills. A soft skills certificate should be seriously considered by the students before their graduation.
- Creating regular soft skill training environment for students by forming Soft Skills Clubs, organizing extracurricular activities, engaging students in other unions and associations...

### IV. Conclusion

Investigating the current situation and training needs of soft skills of TUEBA carefully is an important scientific basis to propose and implement solutions for the training programs so that soft skills can be equipped to students properly. Although TUEBA has focused on training and practicing soft skills for students, this work is still lacking and weak, like many other universities in Vietnam. Therefore, many students still have difficulty and confusion in applying soft skills to their studies and life. They seem to have no right orientation on

how to develop and master their soft skills. The reasons for it are students' attitudes, opinions, and awareness of soft skills training together with difficulties and limitations from the lecturers, and facilities. In addition to this, the program curriculum, content, and method of soft skills training at the university contains inadequacies. Therefore, in the coming time, the university should organize short-term training courses on soft skills intensively and methodically for the students to participate. At the same time, the university should also try to create as many opportunities as possible for students to apply and practice their soft skills regularly so that they can be developed to meet the requirements of the labor market.

#### REFERENCES

- [1]. Hoang Van Hanh, Nguyen Vu (2003). *Vietnamese Dictionary*. Encyclopedia Publishing House, Hanoi.
- [2]. Huynh Van Son (2012). *The reality of soft skills of students at the university of pedagogy*. Journal of Science and Technology - Da Nang University, No. 11 (60) volume 1, pages 93 - 98.
- [3]. Training Department - University of Economics and Business Administration (2021). *Statistics of students up to the year 2021*. University of Economics and Business Administration, Thai Nguyen University
- [4]. Ta Quang Thao (2014), *Developing soft skills for students at universities and colleges to meet the requirements of the labor market in the current period*. Today, Education Magazine, issue 329, period 01, pages 27, 28, 29, March 2014.
- [5]. Greenberg AD & Nilssen AH (2015), *The role of education in building soft skills*, Wain house Research, LLC, page 28, 2015.
- [6]. Yamane, Taro (1967). *Statistics: An Introductory Analysis, 2nd Edition*. New York: Harper and Row.