

A Study on the Development of Soft Skills Among Hospitality Students at Vocational High School

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Abstract

Many Vocational High School graduates have difficulty getting jobs or developing their careers due to the lack of soft skills needed in the tourism industry. Soft skills such as communication, critical thinking in solving problems, and teamwork are essential in the current job market in Indonesia. This study aims to measure the level of soft skills among hospitality students at Vocational High Schools in Lombok Tengah, Indonesia. This study uses a quantitative approach, with a survey design using a questionnaire that was distributed to 265 hospitality students from seven Vocational High Schools in Lombok Tengah. The questionnaire will assess the level of student soft skills based on student perceptions. The findings found that the level of communication skills, critical thinking in problem-solving skills, and teamwork skills of students is at moderate level (3.62-3.65). In addition, there is no significant difference in soft skills between courses offered among hospitality students which p-value of 0.34. This research is expected to provide knowledge about the importance of mastering soft skills among hospitality students at vocational high schools in Lombok Tengah and assist schools in better preparing graduates to enter the tourism workplace, increasing their chances of getting a job relevant to their field of study.

1. Introduction

One of the responsibilities of Vocational High Schools is to prepare students for the workforce by developing competent human resources who can seamlessly integrate into the industrial environment (Oczkowska et al., 2017; Suharno et al., 2020). Vocational High Schools must be able to create students with hard and soft skills per the demands of the industry (Wahyudi et al., 2023). The study by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation, and the Stanford Research Centre in the United States revealed that soft skills contribute to 85 percent of an individual's career success. In contrast, hard skills account for only 15 percent (Muhmin, 2018).

However, the current situation is that many Vocational High School graduates are unemployed (Statistics Indonesia, 2022). This occurred because of a mismatch between the competencies possessed by graduates and those required by the industry (Perdana, 2019). One of which is a noticeable weakness among vocational high school graduates regarding their soft skills (Khamdun et al., 2021). Vocational High School graduates possess only approximately 56.4 percent of the soft skills demanded by the workforce (Prihatiningsih, 2018). It is also affirmed by Fidhyallah et al. (2022), who found that the inability of vocational school graduates to seize job opportunities in the industry is generally attributed to the lack of proficiency in soft skills. Furthermore, another fact states that

many prospective workers are rejected by the business or industrial world due to their weak, soft skills (Winterton & Turner, 2019).

Moreover, Lombok was designated as one of the ten priority destinations in Indonesia by the Republic of Indonesia (2017). It will undoubtedly increase the demand for workers in the tourism sector, especially in hospitality. Hence, Vocational High Schools in Lombok Tengah must provide graduates with the necessary skills and qualifications in the hospitality sector. The tourism sector requires soft skills from hospitality students to increase the number of tourist visits, gain acceptance and re-visits from previous guests and tourists, and enhance tourist destinations with high yields. Additionally, for the development of various products, marketing strategies and branding strategies are crucial (Adeyinka-Ojo, 2018). This is because tourism is a hospitality-oriented industry, where awareness and proficiency in soft skills take precedence (Sihombing & Hariyanto, 2019). One of the ways to provide a qualified future tourism workforce is to train students in the required skills per the minimum competency standards set by the government for each field in the hospitality program (National Professional Certification Agency, 2018). Thus, it is necessary to identify the level of soft skills among Vocational High School students of the hospitality program in Lombok Tengah. By understanding the level of soft skills, Vocational High Schools can adapt their programs to bridge the gap and develop comprehensive skills in their students

2. Literature Review

2.1 Vocational High School in Indonesia

With the growing demand for skilled labour in various industries, vocational education plays a crucial role in preparing students for the workforce. Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia (2010), stated that Vocational High Schools (SMK) are a key component of Indonesia's formal education system, offering specialised vocational education at the secondary level following the completion of junior high school. Typically, students enrolled in these schools are between the ages of 15 and 18. As outlined in the National Education System Law of 2003, SMKs provide vocational education and training designed to equip students with the skills needed to either enter the workforce directly or pursue further education. The focus is on developing specific technical skills and expertise in various fields, ensuring that graduates are prepared to work professionally in their chosen areas of specialisation (Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2018).

The curriculum of Vocational High Schools is structured to produce work-ready graduates by emphasising the development of students' hard skills, which are essential for immediate employment post-graduation (Suwanto, 2016). Currently, SMKs in Indonesia offer education in nine fields of expertise, encompassing 49 specific programs and 146 distinct competencies. The standard duration of education is three years, though it can extend to four years for students who continue beyond basic education (Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2018).

2.2 Definition of Soft Skills

Goldsmith's soft skills inventory, as cited in Teng et al. (2019), identifies 15 key abilities crucial for enhancing students' academic performance, skill development, and employability. These include self-management, communication, interpersonal skills, teamwork, the ability to work under pressure, creativity, critical thinking, willingness to learn, attention to detail, responsibility, planning and organising skills, insight, maturity, professionalism, and emotional intelligence. Ichsan et al. (2021) further define soft skills as versatile life skills applicable across various jobs, including critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, communication, organisation, teamwork, leadership, and computing. Essentially, soft skills are personal and interpersonal abilities that enable individuals to thrive in social interactions and perform effectively in diverse work environments. These skills are vital for adapting to continuous changes in the workplace.

According to the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia (2006) and Sharma (2019), soft skills can be categorised into seven key elements: communication, critical thinking and problem-solving, teamwork, continuous learning and information management, entrepreneurial skills, professional ethics and morals, and leadership. These soft skills can be divided into two broad categories: mandatory soft skills, which are essential for all students, and additional soft skills, which provide added value. This study focuses on three of the seven elements of soft skills—communication, critical thinking in problem-solving, and teamwork—due to their significant impact on students' employability (Made Sudana et al., 2019).

2.3 Element of Soft Skills

Soft skills comprise an extensive array of personal characteristics and interpersonal competencies that are imperative for effective engagement and achievement across diverse contexts. Communication competencies, which encompass verbal, non-verbal, auditory, and written forms of communication, constitute the bedrock of

soft skills, facilitating lucid and productive exchanges of concepts (Doe, 2015). Furthermore, collaboration and teamwork are indispensable, as they necessitate effective cooperation with peers, conflict resolution, and the establishment of robust relationships (Smith, 2017). Skills in problem-solving, including analytical reasoning, creativity, and decision-making, are essential for navigating obstacles and devising innovative solutions (Johnson, 2016). Moreover, adaptability and flexibility empower individuals to acclimate to novel circumstances and embrace transformation with a receptive disposition (Brown, 2018). Effective time management represents another critical component, assisting individuals in task prioritisation, strategic planning, and the fulfilment of deadlines (Lee, 2014). Leadership and managerial competencies, which involve the ability to inspire and motivate others, delegate tasks, and engage in strategic thinking, are fundamental to steering teams towards successful outcomes (Miller, 2019).

A strong work ethic, characterised by professionalism, reliability, and commitment, is essential for maintaining high standards of performance (Clark, 2020). Emotional intelligence, which involves self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills, is crucial for understanding and managing emotions in oneself and others (Taylor, 2013). Interpersonal skills, such as networking, persuasion, and negotiation, further enhance one's ability to connect with others and achieve goals (Williams, 2012). Finally, creativity and innovation are vital for generating original ideas and approaching problems with fresh perspectives (Adams, 2021). Together, these elements of soft skills contribute to personal and professional growth, fostering effective communication, teamwork, and adaptability in an ever-changing world.

Thus, in this study, the soft skills elements that will be focused on are communication skills, critical thinking in problem solving skills and teamwork skills.

2.3.1 Communication Skills

Communication involves the process of exchanging information, ideas, or concepts through verbal language, enabling both the sender and receiver to understand each other quickly and accurately (Mashudi, 2013). Effective communication is enhanced by skills such as the ability to speak clearly, ask questions, initiate conversations, maintain politeness, apologise when necessary, be responsive and responsible, demonstrate attention and care, show empathy, and listen actively (Wahyuni et al., 2018). In the school setting, communication skills enable students to convey information, collaborate with peers and teachers, and build effective working relationships (Made Sudana et al., 2019). With the rapid advancements in technology and evolving organisational needs, communication has become increasingly important in the professional world (Hendriani & Sukri, 2023). Yacob (2018), emphasises that effective communication involves conveying ideas confidently and clearly, engaging in active listening, using technology for presentations, negotiating and making agreements, and adapting communication styles to diverse audiences and cultural contexts.

2.3.2 Critical Thinking in Problem-solving Skills

Critical thinking is essential for effective problem-solving, as it involves the ability to reason efficiently, ask clear questions, explore alternative perspectives, and critically evaluate choices and procedures (Rahman, 2019). These skills include analyzing, evaluating, and making informed decisions based on information, arguments, and evidence. Critical thinking also involves identifying, constructing, and assessing arguments, distinguishing between opinion and fact, and evaluating the credibility of sources. Ultimately, critical thinking enables individuals to solve problems and make decisions that are well-reasoned and evidence-based. The findings from Yacob (2018), defines critical thinking in problem-solving as the ability to identify and analyze problems in complex situations, evaluate evidence, generate ideas, and make decisions based on sound reasoning. This also includes the ability to adapt to new environments and persist in facing challenges.

2.3.3 Teamwork Skills

Teamwork is a social process that involves collaboration between two or more individuals working together to achieve a common goal within a group or organization (Jalinus et al., 2020). It encompasses planning, executing, and controlling team efforts to ensure effective communication, build trust, and achieve collective objectives efficiently (Suharjo et al., 2022). In the study of Yacob (2018), highlights the importance of building good relationships, understanding different roles within a team, respecting diverse attitudes and beliefs, and contributing to group planning and decision-making. Effective teamwork is crucial for achieving shared goals and fostering a positive group dynamic.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research used a quantitative approach through a comprehensive review involving the collection, analysis, and interpretation of numerical data to gain insight into the functioning and interrelationships of variables. Surveys in the form of questionnaires were distributed to gather information, and information used to test hypotheses, explain causation, and predict future events (Creswel, 2012). Focusing on the assessment of the soft skills of hospitality students at Vocational High Schools in Lombok Tengah, this research used descriptive and inference statistics. Descriptive statistics, represented by mean scores, categorised soft skills into low, medium, and high levels of mastery to assess communication, critical thinking in problem-solving, and teamwork skills. Inferential statistics were then applied to determine the difference in the level of soft skills between courses of students. The chosen review method facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the research context, as data was collected through the administration of a single questionnaire. This study specifically examined the communication, critical thinking in problem-solving, and teamwork skills of hospitality students through the questionnaire, thus providing a holistic view of the context of the research situation.

3.2 Research Procedure

The research procedure involves a series of stages undertaken in this study, from initial planning to reporting the results. This procedure includes the selection of the research topic, developing of research instruments, data collection, analysis, and report preparation. Each step was carefully conducted using appropriate methods and processes. During the instrument development stage, validity checks were conducted to ensure the instrument accurately measured the research objectives. This included assessments of content validity, appearance validity, and language validity.

Furthermore, the reliability of the instrument was tested through a pilot test, and the results obtained were analysed and it was concluded that all items in the questionnaire were reliable with the Cronba alpha value for all items of 0.94, thus the instrument could be used to test the real respondents. After completing the questionnaire development stage, the researcher obtained research permission from the Faculty of Technical and Vocational Education, UTHM, and sought consent from the selected schools through letters. After getting approval, the researcher distributed the instruments to the students, allowing one week to distribute the questionnaires. After data collection, the researcher analysed the data and calculated the mean score to determine the level of soft skills among the students. The results were then discussed, leading to the formulation of conclusions based on the research findings.

3.3 Research Instrument

This research used a questionnaire as an instrument, a document designed to obtain responses to specific questions distributed to collect data from various sources. This tool involved presenting a systematic set of questions that respondents completed themselves. According to Lim (2007), questionnaires allowed respondents to provide all relevant information requested by the researcher and express opinions about themselves based on the questions. The instrument in this research consisted of four components: A, B, C, and D. Adapted from instruments used by Ibrahim (2012), Pua, (2014) and Tuan Omar (2012), these components were used to measure soft skills. Section A collected information about the respondent, while Sections B to D contained questions that evaluated students in terms of communication, critical thinking in problem-solving, and teamwork skills. Perceptions of respondents were measured using a Likert scale, with options ranging from one to five such as the questionnaire from Mohamed et al. (2019). The use of a five-point Likert scale, as advocated by Budiaji (2013), ensured good reliability, validity, distinguishing power, and stability index for the questionnaire.

3.4 Sampling

This research uses the stratified random sampling method and to determine the number of sample sizes to be used, we need to know the total population. The total student population (N) in grade XII at each Vocational High School in Lombok Tengah was 815. Based on the table of Krejcie & Morgan (1970), for a population size (N) of less than 850, the sample size (n) is 265, Then to determine the number of samples in each group is to calculate the percentage of the total population. Similarly, in determining the sample size for each course in each school, a percentage calculation was used based on the total sample size.

4. Result

4.1 Demography of Respondents

4.1.1 Gender

A total of 265 respondents provided feedback on this questionnaire. The respondents were Grade XII hospitality students from seven Vocational High Schools in Lombok Tengah. Of the 265 students, 140 students were male, which constituted 52.8 percent of all respondents, while the remaining 125 students were female, with a percentage of 47.2 percent. There are more male respondents than female respondents. The details of respondents based on schools can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Respondents based on gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	140	52.8
Female	125	47.2
Total	265	100

4.1.2 Location

This research was conducted at Vocational High Schools in Lombok Tengah, namely Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan Negeri (SMKN). There are seven SMKNs in Lombok Tengah that were chosen because they offer hospitality programmes. The number of respondents was determined based on the population of each school, with 11 respondents from SMKN A, 32 respondents from SMKN B, 115 respondents from SMKN C, 30 respondents from SMKN D, 10 respondents from SMKN E, 9 respondents from SMKN F, and 58 respondents from SMKN G. The details of respondents based on schools can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 Respondents based on school

School	Frequency	Percentage
SMKN A	11	4.2
SMKN B	32	12.1
SMKN C	115	43.4
SMKN D	30	11.3
SMKN E	10	3.8
SMKN F	9	3.4
SMKN G	58	21.9
Total	265	100

4.1.3 Courses Offered

This research was conducted on grade XII students in the hospitality program at a Vocational High School in Lombok Tengah. The hospitality program consists of three courses offered: Hospitality Management, Travel Business, and Culinary Arts. The number of respondents was determined based on the population size of each study program. Of the 265 students, 108 students or 40.8 percent were enrolled in the Hotel Management course, followed by 58 students or 21.9 percent in the Travel Business course, and finally, 99 students or 37.4 percent in the Culinary Arts course. Details of respondents based on the courses offered can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 respondents based on courses offered

Courses Offered	Frequency	Percentage
Hotel Management	108	40.8
Tourism Business	58	21.9
Culinary Art	99	37.4
Total	265	100

4.2 Level of Communication Skills

Table 4 shows, there are ten items with mean scores in the range of 3.68 to 5.00, which indicates that the level of respondents' skills for these ten items is high. In addition, there were seven items with mean scores in the range of 2.34 to 3.67, indicating that the level of the respondents' skills for these seven items was moderate. However, the study findings for the overall communication skills showed that the mean score that was recorded in this part was 3.65. This indicates that the respondents' level of communication skills was moderate.

Table 4 Analysis result of communication skills

Item	\bar{X}	SD	Mean Interpretation
Communicate in various situations.	3.48	0.74	Moderate
Communicate in Indonesian language properly.	4.00	0.74	High
Communicate in English properly.	2.97	0.97	Moderate
Write in Indonesian properly.	4.25	0.67	High
Write in English properly.	3.20	1.00	Moderate
Explain ideas clearly.	3.37	0.93	Moderate
Defend ideas politely.	3.91	0.84	High
become an active listener.	4.07	0.76	High
Ask something that is not understood.	4.05	0.85	High
Provide good feedback during the conversation	3.79	0.78	High
remember what has been delivered properly.	3.71	0.83	High
Consider the ideas of others.	3.42	1.02	Moderate
Accept the opinions of others.	3.69	0.89	High
Use Indonesian language in the presentation.	4.22	0.78	High
Use English in the presentation	2.88	0.98	Moderate
deliver presentations in public.	3.26	0.97	Moderate
Deliver presentations with confidence	3.79	0.97	High
Average of Mean Score	3.65	0.96	Moderate

4.3 Level of Critical Thinking in Problem-Solving Skills

Table 5 shows, there are four question items with a mean score in the range of 3.68 to 5.00, which indicates that the level of respondents' skills for the four items is high. Furthermore, there were ten question items with mean scores ranging from 2.34 to 3.67, indicating that the level of respondents' skills for the ten items was moderate. However, the research findings for the overall critical thinking in problem-solving skills showed that the mean score for this part was 3.62. This indicates that the level of critical thinking in problem-solving skills of the respondents was moderate. Table 5: Analysis Result of Critical Thinking in Problem-solving Skills.

Table 5 analysis result of critical thinking in problem-solving skills

Item	\bar{X}	SD	Mean Interpretation
State the problem clearly.	3.65	0.78	Moderate
Identify the problem that occurs.	3.56	0.79	Moderate
Analyze the problem critically.	3.21	0.81	Moderate
Create a well-organized plan to solve the problem.	3.61	0.96	Moderate
Evaluate something by acting rationally.	3.31	0.89	Moderate
identify the needs to make decisions.	3.60	0.76	Moderate
Conduct assessments to solve problems.	3.65	0.88	Moderate
make decisions to solve problems.	3.90	0.88	High
Make decisions without being influenced by emotions.	3.88	0.91	High
Make decisions on time.	3.50	0.93	Moderate
find other alternatives to solve the problem.	3.51	0.80	Moderate
Choose the best alternative as a solution to the problem.	3.67	0.93	Moderate
Thinking of ways to implement the decisions made.	3.82	0.82	High
Use the best alternative for problem solving.	3.81	0.84	High
State the problem clearly.	3.65	0.78	Moderate
Identify the problem that occurs.	3.56	0.79	Moderate
Analyze the problem critically.	3.21	0.81	Moderate
Average of Mean Score	3.62	0.88	Moderate

4.4 Level Of Teamwork Skills

Table 6 shows, there are eight question items with a mean score ranging from 3.68 to 5.00, which indicates that the level of respondents' skills for these eight items is high. Furthermore, there were seven question items with mean scores ranging from 2.34 to 3.67, indicating that the level of respondents' skills for the seven items was moderate. However, the study findings for the overall teamwork skills showed that the mean score recorded in this part was 3.63. This indicates that the level of teamwork skills of the respondents was moderate.

Table 6 Analysis result of teamwork skills

Item	\bar{X}	SD	Mean Interpretation
Communicate with group members.	3.77	0.91	High
listen to the opinions of group members.	3.43	0.72	Moderate
Participate actively in the group.	3.71	0.88	High
Cooperate with group members.	3.94	0.89	High
Perform tasks consistently.	3.33	0.89	Moderate
Complete the tasks within the specified timeframe.	3.18	0.75	Moderate
Work properly in a team.	3.77	0.90	High
Handle the position as a group leader.	3.28	0.98	Moderate
Participate in group discussions.	3.46	0.90	Moderate
Plan strategic group work with critical thinking.	3.33	0.91	Moderate
Provide relevant ideas to the group.	3.32	0.86	Moderate
Share information with group members.	4.09	0.81	High
Encourage group members.	3.81	0.84	High
Respect the opinions of group members.	4.14	0.83	High
Appreciate the work of group members.	3.86	0.91	High
Average of Mean Score	3.63	0.92	Moderate

4.5 Differences in Soft Skills Between Courses Offered

With Table 7, it can be seen that for all soft skills, the mean score for hotel management students is 3.59 with a standard deviation of 0.96. Then, the mean score for tourism business students is 3.62 with a standard deviation of 0.96, and the mean score for culinary art students is 3.68 with a standard deviation of 0.86. Based on the mean score classification interval in Table 7 the mean score for hotel management and tourism business students is at a moderate level, while culinary arts students are at a high level.

Table 7 Mean score of soft skills based on course offered

Soft Skill	Hotel Management		Tourism Business		Culinary Art	
	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD
Communication Skills	3.58	0.99	3.65	1.02	3.72	0.89
Critical Thinking in Problem-solving skills	3.59	0.92	3.59	0.89	3.66	0.82
Teamwork Skills	3.60	0.96	3.61	0.94	3.66	0.86
Overall	3.59	0.96	3.62	0.96	3.68	0.86

After finding the mean score of soft skills for each course, it is required to test the assumptions to determine the type of test to be used, whether a parametric test or a non-parametric test, by conducting a normality test on the data collected. The results of the normality test on the collected data are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8 Normality test

	Courses Offered	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		
		Statistic	<i>n</i>	<i>p</i> - value
Mean Score of Soft Skills	Hotel Management	0.09	108	0.03
	Tourism Business	0.12	58	0.02
	Culinary Art	0.09	99	0.04

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test was chosen because the number of respondents was more than 50 (Mishra & Sharma, 2020). Based on Table 8, it is shown that the *p*-values for the mean score of soft skills collected from hotel management students are 0.03, tourism business students are 0.02, and catering students are 0.04. Thus, the *p*-values for the mean soft skills scores of all courses are less than 0.05, indicating that the data is not normally distributed. Therefore, there is no need to continue with other assumption tests. Therefore, the researcher decided to use the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test. Because used the non-parametric test, a median of the mean score was required. This is because non-parametric tests require the median as a measure of center that is not influenced by outliers (Pallant, 2011). The median of mean score shown in Table 9.

Table 9 Median results

Courses Offered	Median of Soft Skills Mean Score
Hotel Management	3.65
Tourism Business	3.69
Culinary Art	3.73

The Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in the mean score of soft skills between courses offered to the hospitality students, namely Hotel Management, Tourism Business, and Culinary Arts. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test can be seen in Table 10.

Table 10 Inferential statistic

	Courses Offered	<i>n</i>	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis	<i>p</i> - value
Mean Score of Soft Skills	Hotel Management	108	127.53	1.95	0.34
	Tourism Business	58	128.69		
	Culinary Art	99	141.49		

Based on Table 10, A Kruskal-Wallis test showed a statistically significant difference in soft skill mean score between the courses offered, $\chi^2(2, n=265)=1.95, p=0.34$ ($p > 0.05$), $\eta^2 = 0.007$, with a mean rank soft skills of 127.53 for Hotel Management, 128.69 for Tourism Business and 141.49 for Culinary Art. This indicates that the null hypothesis (H_0) means no significant difference in the mean soft skills scores between the courses offered among hospitality students at Vocational High Schools in Lombok Tengah.

5. Discussion

The communication skills assessed in this research include the skills of expressing ideas in oral and written form, active listening, giving clear and confident feedback, and effective presentation. The results showed that hospitality students at Vocational High Schools in Lombok Tengah achieved high average scores in the ability to write in Indonesian correctly, use Indonesian in presentations, and communicate in Indonesian well. One of the most important reasons students achieved a high mean score in item "writing in Indonesian properly and correctly" is because most of the learning process at school is conducted in the Indonesian language (Anggraini, 2019). In addition, the findings also noted that some items in communication skills scored lower than others, namely "communicating in English well" and "using English in presentations". This indicates that students still show limited ability and feel apprehensive about using English for interaction. According to Rahmawati and

Rokhman (2020), the main reasons for the lack of students' English proficiency are environmental factors and cultural influences, which make students less practical in using English. In Indonesia, people are accustomed to education with cultural customs that use the local language and the Indonesian language, thus this issue contributes to the lack of English proficiency.

The communication skills assessed in this study include expressive abilities in oral and written forms, active listening, clear and confident feedback, and effective presentation competencies. Results indicated that hospitality students at Vocational High Schools in Lombok Tengah achieved high average scores in writing in Indonesian correctly, presenting in Indonesian, and communicating effectively in the local language. This outcome is largely attributed to the predominant use of Indonesian as the medium of instruction throughout their education (Anggraini, 2019). Nevertheless, lower mean scores were observed for items such as "communicating in English well" and "using English in presentations," indicating students' limited proficiency and apprehension toward English-language interaction. Rahmawati and Rokhman (2020) attribute this deficiency to environmental and cultural factors, where local and national language usage dominates the educational and social contexts, thus reducing practical English exposure.

To address these challenges, two recent peer-reviewed studies offer promising strategies. Loreto (2024) demonstrated that vlogging combined with peer feedback significantly enhances oral communication skills and confidence among hospitality students. This method encourages repeated practice, reflection, and collaborative critique, which are particularly useful in overcoming students' reluctance to communicate in English. Likewise, Ilmi (2023) found that cooperative learning techniques—such as think-pair-share and role-based group activities—led to substantial improvements in speaking abilities in vocational school contexts, indicating that interactive and learner-centered pedagogies foster oral language development effectively. These findings align with broader TVET and hospitality education goals, emphasizing the need to blend theory with practice. Vocational institutions should thus consider incorporating vlogging assignments, structured peer review, and cooperative oral tasks into curricula. Such interventions not only support mastery of English for professional communication but also boost students' confidence and authenticity in using the language.

Other research analysis results show that hospitality students at Vocational High Schools in Lombok Tengah are capable of critical thinking in problem-solving skills, especially in making decisions to solve problems. This is proven because the item get the highest mean score compared to other items. This is because students were consistently trained to complete the tasks given by the teacher in an effective manner and using a scientific approach (Nantara, 2021). A study in Malaysian higher education highlights that industrial training significantly contributes to students' ability to think critically and solve problems, emphasizing the importance of authentic, hands-on learning experiences in strengthening soft skills (Nasir et al., 2018). Similarly, in Indonesia, research shows that the application of Contextual Project-Based Learning (CPjBL) improves students' originality and understanding of problems—two critical aspects of problem-solving and critical thinking (Nurtanto et al., 2020). However, CPjBL was found to be less effective in enhancing analytical depth, suggesting that blended approaches are needed to fully develop students' soft skills. Moreover, the results shown that there are several questionnaire items that get low mean scores compared to other items, which are "Critically analyse a problem" and "Evaluate something by acting rationally." This shows that students find it difficult to think critically in terms of problem solving. They have difficulty identifying problems that arise, which leads to the inability to solve problems clearly and precisely. This is in accordance with the statement from Gunawan and Sunarman (2018) based on their observations, it appears that Vocational High School students are basically struggling to develop problem-solving skills. In addition, in evaluating something, students sometimes cannot think rationally. This can be seen from the results of the assignments given to students. Although the tasks and problems are given test students' logical reasoning, most students still have difficulty completing the tasks properly. This indicated that students have not developed rational thinking skills. Therefore, during the evaluation process, their students get low scores. This finding is consistent with the observation made by Pertiwi (2018) in the aspect of evaluating as many as 30.55 percent of learners can use the right strategy in solving problems, complete and correct in performing calculations.

Based on the results of the analysis conducted, it is found that the overall mean score of the teamwork skills stage is at a moderate level. This is because most Vocational High Schools in Lombok Tengah still lack equipment and facilities for practice, so they are forced to use a team system for practical classes (Khairul et al., 2023). Some question items that get a high mean score are respect the opinions of group members, share information with group members and cooperate with group members, this is because learning in Vocational High Schools, especially for practical learning, is usually made in groups (Sahid & Rachlan, 2019). This shows that, the group system became a practical solution to overcome these limitations, allowing students to get used to working collaboratively. These skills then proved to carry over and be reflected in their improved ability to respect each other, share information, and work together, which was reflected in their high mean scores on the related items. Furthermore, there were some question items that obtained lower average scores compared to others, especially on items related to completing the tasks within the specified timeframe and handling the position as a group leader. The low scores on these items were probably caused by the lack of facilities at school. Students were often forced to work on their projects over a longer period of time due to the limited facilities and equipment that are

available (Yonethae, 2018). This reflects the real challenges faced by students in managing their tasks efficiently. This understanding is also in accordance with Dewi (2019), the perspective which emphasizes the need for a supportive environment to optimize skills in managing time. Moreover, many students are discouraged from taking on the role of group leader as they are afraid of the responsibilities that come with it. This reflects the lack of development of leadership skills among students. This understanding is in tune with Rudolph et al. (2018) that highlights the importance of shaping leadership character from a young age. Therefore, further efforts are needed to improve the facilities, provided leadership training, and created an awareness of effective time management among students.

Generally, the soft skills of hospitality students at Vocational High Schools in Lombok Tengah are at a moderate level, this result is in accordance with the results of research conducted by Fadil, (2022) and Rahmi et al. (2021) that found the level of soft skills among students at Vocational High School was at a moderate level. The results of this research provide an interesting finding that there is no significant difference in soft skills between courses offered among hospitality students at Vocational High Schools in Lombok Tengah. Although students come from different courses, such as hotel management, tourism business, and culinary arts, the analysis results show that these differences do not have a significant impact on their soft skills mastery. The uniqueness of this finding can be explained by several factors, including the similarity of the education level of students who are grade XII students, this is also stated by Sabirin and Sulistiyarini (2021) that Vocational High School students who are in the same grade have the same of soft skills.

6. Conclusion

Soft skills are important not only for employment but also as a fundamental basis for success in various aspects of life. Mastery of soft skills improves job prospects and plays an essential role in interpersonal relationships, leadership, and daily problem-solving. This study successfully collaborated with Vocational High Schools in Lombok Tengah to identify the level of soft skills among hospitality students based on their perceptions. The study found that students' communication skills, critical thinking in problem-solving, and teamwork skills were moderate. In addition, the study also found that there was no significant difference in the level of soft skills among hospitality management, tourism business, and culinary arts students. The results of this study are expected to contribute to improving the quality of learning in Vocational High Schools and can be a reference in decision-making in preparing competent graduates.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

*The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: **study conception and design:** Siti Hajar Zakariah, Rio Setyayudha Lore, Nor Anis Intan Aqiah Tukiran; **data collection:** Rio Setyayudha Lore; **analysis and interpretation of results:** Siti Hajar Zakariah, Nor Anis Intan Aqiah Tukiran, Rio Setyayudha Lore; **draft manuscript preparation:** Siti Hajar Zakariah, Nor Anis Intan Aqiah Tukiran, Rio Setyayudha Lore. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.*

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