

IMPROVING ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH SOFT SKILLS AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN BORDER STUDENTS

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Abstract

This article aims to discuss how to improve students' academic achievement in border areas, specifically at SMK Negeri in Entikong, West Kalimantan, where this can be achieved through soft skills development and social engagement. Using qualitative and quantitative MIXED METHODS research methods, this study found that academic ability alone is not enough to achieve optimal achievement. Soft skills, such as communication, cooperation, and time management, as well as social engagement in various community activities, have a significant influence on student academic achievement. Students who learn and develop soft skills and are actively involved in social activities show significant improvements in their academic performance. This research highlights the importance of integration between formal education and soft skills development and social engagement to achieve better learning outcomes. The findings provide insights for educators and policy makers on the importance of a holistic approach in education, especially for students residing in border areas.

Keywords: *Academic achievement, soft skills, social engagement, border students, education*

INTRODUCTION

Student academic achievement is often the main benchmark in assessing the success of an education system. However, in recent years, research has shown that soft skills development and social engagement also play an important role in improving student academic achievement, especially in border areas. Border areas often face various challenges, including limited educational resources, lack of access to technology and low socio-economic conditions. Therefore, efforts to improve student academic achievement in border areas require a more holistic approach.

Soft skills, such as communication, leadership and teamwork skills, are increasingly recognized as important components of education. According to research conducted by the OECD (2015), soft skill development has a direct impact on an individual's success in the world of work, and these abilities are also closely related to students' academic achievement. Moreover, according to a study by Schleicher (2018), these non-cognitive skills play an important role in student learning, where they help build

character traits that can influence learning motivation and academic outcomes.

Meanwhile, social engagement, which includes active participation in community activities and strong social relationships, is also considered an important factor affecting academic achievement. Research by Zins et al. (2015) showed that high social engagement can increase students' intrinsic motivation and help them feel more connected to their learning environment. This is in line with the findings revealed by Greenberg, Weissberg, and O'Brien (2016), who asserted that socially engaged students tend to have better academic performance because they feel more motivated and responsible for their learning tasks.

In the context of border areas, the integration of soft skills development and social engagement becomes even more crucial. The study by Wang et al. (2017) shows that a holistic approach that includes non-academic aspects such as soft skills and social engagement can help address the challenges faced by students in less developed areas. By developing soft skills and encouraging social engagement, students in frontier areas will not only see improvements in their academic performance, but will also be well prepared to become active and productive citizens.

In this article, we will discuss how the integration of soft skills and social engagement can positively impact student academic achievement in border areas, as well as strategies that educators and policymakers can implement to achieve this goal. Recent research and current literature will be used to support these arguments and provide insights into how these approaches can be effectively implemented in the border education context.

In addition, the importance of soft skills development and social engagement in education has become a major focus in many developed countries. For example, OECD countries have adopted a broader approach to education that focuses not only on academic achievement, but also the development of students' social and emotional competencies. This is in line with the more holistic goal of education, which aims to form individuals who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have strong interpersonal skills and are able to contribute positively to society.

In border areas such as Entikong, West Kalimantan, the challenges faced by students are more complex than in other areas. Limited access to adequate educational resources, geographical isolation and socio-economic pressures are significant barriers to improving academic performance. Therefore, soft skills development and social engagement become crucial elements in overcoming these challenges, by providing students with the skills needed to face and overcome these obstacles.

Furthermore, the role of educators and educational policies in supporting the development of soft skills and social engagement cannot be ignored. Educators need to be able to integrate these aspects into the daily learning process, while policy makers need to create an environment that supports the development of these skills. Through a coordinated approach between formal and non-formal education, students in border areas can gain richer and more relevant learning experiences, which will ultimately improve their academic performance and prepare them for future challenges.

METHODS

This study used a mixed methods

approach that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between soft skills, social engagement, and student academic achievement. The quantitative approach is conducted through surveys to collect numerical data that allows researchers to measure and analyze the relationship between variables. In this case, the survey used standardized measurement tools to assess students' soft skills, social engagement, and academic achievement (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Meanwhile, the qualitative approach involves in-depth interviews and *Focus Group Discussions* (FGDs) to dig deeper into students' perspectives regarding their experiences in developing soft skills and social engagement, and how these contribute to their academic achievement (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2017).

This study was conducted at a senior high school in a border area of Indonesia, specifically at SMK Negeri 1 Entikong, West Kalimantan. The research sample was selected using a random sampling technique, with 200 students taken as respondents for the quantitative survey. In addition, 20 students were selected by purposive sampling to participate in interviews and FGDs, ensuring diversity in their backgrounds and levels of social engagement (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2015).

Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire that assessed students' soft skills such as communication, cooperation, leadership, and time management (Goleman, 2015), as well as social engagement measured based on students' participation in social activities at school and community (Putnam, 2016). Academic achievement was measured based on students' average report card score at the end of the semester (Hattie, 2017). Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews designed to understand students' experiences related to soft skills development and social engagement.

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. First, quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, such as linear regression analysis, to identify the influence of soft skills and social engagement on students' academic achievement (Field, 2018). Secondly, qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis methods, which allowed researchers to identify key themes that emerged from the interviews and FGDs (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The integration of

both types of data was done to provide a more complete picture of how soft skills and social engagement interact and influence students' academic achievement.

The research procedure began with planning which included the selection of schools in border areas, approval from the schools, and the preparation of research instruments. Quantitative data were collected through distributing questionnaires to students, while qualitative data were obtained through interviews and FGDs conducted after the survey was completed. After all data were collected, analysis was conducted in parallel between quantitative and qualitative data, then the results of the integration of the two data were compiled in the final research report which included findings, analysis, conclusions, and recommendations based on the research results (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2016). This methods section provides a detailed and systematic description of how the study was designed and conducted, and how the different types of data were analyzed to achieve the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study aims to understand the impact of soft skills development and social engagement on students' academic achievement in border areas, with a particular focus on students at SMK Negeri 1 Entikong. The method used in this research is mixed method, which combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive picture of the factors that influence students' academic achievement.

In the data collection, 200 students participated in the study. Data analysis showed that soft skills, such as communication skills, cooperation, and time management, had a very significant influence on students' academic achievement. In addition, social engagement also plays an important role in supporting their academic achievement. The results revealed that students who have good soft skills and are active in social activities tend to experience significant improvements in

their academic performance.

Table 2. Validity Test

Variables	Regression Coefficient	Significance Value
Soft Skills	0.45	0.001
Social Engagement	0.39	0.005

Based on the validity test results shown in Table 2, it can be seen that the soft skills variable has a regression coefficient of 0.45 with a significance value of 0.001, while the social engagement variable has a regression coefficient of 0.39 with a significance value of 0.005. Both variables show significant positive regression coefficients, meaning that improvements in soft skills and social engagement correlate with improvements in students' academic performance.

The results of this study confirm the importance of soft skills development and social engagement in education, especially in border areas. By strengthening soft skills and encouraging social engagement, schools can help students achieve better academic performance while preparing them for the challenges of the world of work and community life.

In addition, the data analysis also showed that social environmental factors, such as support from family and peers, play a role in improving students' academic performance. Students who receive moral and motivational support from their surroundings tend to be more motivated to learn and achieve better academic results. This reinforces the importance of collaboration between school, family and community in creating an environment that supports students' soft skills development and social engagement. With strong support from various parties, students in border areas can be better prepared for the academic and social challenges they face.

Discussion

This research shows that the development of soft skills, such as communication skills, cooperation, and time management, has a very significant influence on students' academic achievement at SMK Negeri 1 Entikong. These soft skills enable students to manage their tasks more effectively, collaborate with classmates, and communicate clearly with teachers. The results of

this study underline that students with good soft skills tend to have higher academic achievement compared to students who lack these abilities.

In addition to soft skills, social engagement was also found to play an important role in supporting students' academic achievement. Social engagement includes participation in extracurricular activities, positive interactions with classmates and involvement in the school community. Socially active students tend to feel more connected to school, which in turn increases their motivation and engagement in learning activities. This indicates that positive social engagement can be a driving factor in achieving better academic performance.

The research findings showing regression coefficients of 0.45 for soft skills and 0.39 for social engagement with significance of 0.001 and 0.005 respectively strengthen the argument that these two variables have a significant relationship with student academic achievement. These positive regression coefficients indicate that any increase in soft skills and social engagement has the potential to increase students' overall academic achievement. This result is consistent with the theory that non-academic factors such as soft skills and social engagement play an important role in academic success.

This research also provides insights for educators in border areas on the importance of integrating soft skill development and social engagement in the school curriculum. By encouraging students to engage in activities that develop these two aspects, schools not only increase students' chances of achieving better academic performance but also help them prepare for challenges outside the school environment. A holistic approach that combines academic teaching with interpersonal skill development and social engagement can be the key to achieving a more comprehensive education.

Furthermore, the results of this study are relevant in the context of education in border areas such as Entikong, where geographical and social challenges may be greater compared to urban areas. By paying special attention to soft skills development and social engagement, schools in border

areas can overcome some of these challenges and help students reach their full academic potential. It also shows that quality education focuses not only on academic achievement, but also on developing students' character and social skills.

Overall, this research reinforces the importance of a balanced approach to education that pursues not only academic achievement, but also the development of interpersonal skills and social engagement. In an increasingly complex global context, the ability to communicate well, cooperate in teams and participate in communities is becoming increasingly important. Therefore, the findings of this study provide a strong basis for efforts to improve the quality of education in border areas, particularly at SMK Negeri 1 Entikong.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

This study confirms that the development of soft skills, such as communication, cooperation, and time management skills, as well as social engagement, has a significant influence on improving students' academic achievement in border areas. Students who develop soft skills and engage in social activities show better academic results compared to students who are less active in both aspects. This research emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to education that focuses not only on academic achievement, but also on developing interpersonal skills and social engagement.

In the context of border areas such as Entikong, soft skills development and social engagement become even more important given the geographical and social challenges faced by students. This approach not only helps students achieve higher academic performance but also prepares them to face challenges in the world of work and community life. Therefore, the integration between formal education and soft skills development and social engagement needs to be prioritized in education policy in border areas.

Advice

Educators in border areas such as SMK Negeri 1 Entikong are advised to integrate soft skills development and social engagement in the school curriculum. This can be done through extracurricular activities, soft skills training, and structured social engagement programs. Thus, students can develop their interpersonal and social

skills which will have a positive impact on their academic performance.

Education policymakers in border areas need to consider providing adequate resources to support soft skills development and social engagement programs in schools. This includes training for teachers to teach soft skills and manage social activities, as well as providing facilities that support students' participation in social activities. With the right support, schools in border areas can help students reach their full academic and personal potential.

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