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The development of student's soft skills in Tutorial Webinar (Tuweb) at Universitas Terbuka

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to see the development of student soft skills in online learning at Universitas Terbuka (UT). The case study focused on postgraduate students at UT. The soft skills aspects are teamwork and communication in webinar tutorials (Tuweb) at the UT Postgraduate Program. The selected two aspects departed from the results of previous research, which observed the development of student soft skills in several aspects. Two aspects stand out in learning, namely teamwork and communication. The data collection instrument used was Focused Group Discussion (FGD). Data analysis uses content analysis. An important result of the research is that the two aspects of students' soft skills on Tuweb have developed as expected in online learning at UT. This result is an interesting reason for students to study at UT, considering that UT conducts online learning. Students' ability develops not only from the aspect of hard skills but also from the aspect of soft skills. The study's findings suggest that online learning can be an effective way for students to develop their soft skills.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk melihat perkembangan soft skill mahasiswa dalam pembelajaran daring di Universitas Terbuka (UT). Studi kasus berfokus pada mahasiswa pascasarjana di UT. Aspek soft skill yang dilihat adalah aspek kerjasama tim dan komunikasi dalam tutorial webinar (Tuweb) di Program Pascasarjana UT. Dua aspek yang dipilih berangkat dari hasil penelitian sebelumnya yang mengamati perkembangan soft skill mahasiswa pada beberapa aspek. Ada dua aspek yang menonjol dalam pembelajaran, yaitu kerjasama tim dan komunikasi. Instrumen pengumpulan data yang digunakan adalah Focused Group Discussion (FGD). Analisis data menggunakan content analysis. Hasil penting dari penelitian ini adalah pengembangan kedua aspek soft skill mahasiswa pada tuweb telah berkembang sesuai dengan yang diharapkan dalam pembelajaran daring di UT. Hasil tersebut menjadi alasan menarik mahasiswa untuk kuliah di UT, mengingat UT melaksanakan pembelajaran secara daring. Kemampuan peserta didik berkembang tidak hanya dari aspek hard skill saja tetapi juga dari aspek soft skill. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran online dapat menjadi cara yang efektif bagi siswa untuk mengembangkan soft skill mereka.

Kata Kunci: *Kerjasama; komunikasi; soft skill; tutorial online; tutorial webinar*

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, online learning is the preferred way of delivering learning processes familiar and used at every level of education in Indonesia, from early to high school. Amidst the ever-evolving landscape of education, online learning has emerged as the primary mode of delivering educational content across all levels in Indonesia. The widespread adoption of digital learning platforms has revolutionized traditional teaching and learning methods. This shift towards online education has become deeply entrenched, becoming the go-to approach to delivering educational content and engaging students from early to high school. Zheng (2021) found that most students had favorable views of online education during the pandemic and wished to keep using online learning tools and methods even after the pandemic ended. Ulum (2022) supported that online education during the pandemic was primarily classroom-style teaching conducted by teachers from their schools - it was an extension of regular school education moved into the virtual space.

The pervasive nature of online learning has transformed the educational ecosystem, making it a familiar and integral part of the educational journey for Indonesian students. From the foundational years of early education to the formative stages in high school, the accessibility and convenience offered by online learning platforms have gained immense traction among educators, students, and parents alike. Online learning stands out because of its flexibility, adaptability, and unique capability of providing individualized learning experiences. Its prowess to overcome geographical limitations makes it an effective tool for educational inclusivity, giving everyone with internet access a chance to tap into a world-class education (Anggoro & Dwisatyadini, 2022). This widespread utilization of online learning methods across educational tiers reflects its adaptability and flexibility, catering to diverse learning needs. In Indonesia, where geographical barriers and logistical constraints might impede traditional educational access, online learning has bridged these gaps, making quality education more accessible to a broader spectrum of students.

Moreover, the preference for online learning methods has been further accentuated by the recent global challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which propelled the rapid adoption of remote learning as a necessity. Consequently, educational institutions and stakeholders have embraced technology-enabled learning to ensure continuous education delivery while navigating uncertain times. The ubiquity of online learning as the favored mode of education delivery underlines its significance in shaping the educational landscape of Indonesia. However, amid this transition, understanding the implications and effectiveness of cultivating students' soft skills within online learning is a crucial area that demands exploration and attention.

Universitas Terbuka (UT) is an open and distance higher education (*Pendidikan Terbuka dan Jarak Jauh*), which is a system that combines the concept of open education with distance education methods based on Belawati in the book titled "*Perkembangan Pemikiran Tentang Pendidikan Terbuka dan Jarak Jauh,*" in 2009. Open education (open education or open learning) is a policy objective or ideal regarding the education system. UT was one of the universities that has long supported online learning (Nirmala et al., 2023) and a pioneer in online learning; it has been PTJJ since 1984. According to Ferry et al. (2020), online learning can be defined as instruction delivered on a digital device intended to support learning.

Online learning is distance learning in practice. Moreover, according to Belawati in the publication "Pembelajaran Online," published in 2020, distance learning always uses technology in implementing learning, from the simplest to the newest. Online learning is not just storing learning materials online but also organizing learning online. Apart from online learning materials, there is also an online learning process. To support learning services, UT, in this case, uses its Learning Management System (LMS) to provide online learning materials. Through this learning, higher education institutions, in this case UT, have, of course, and will continue to innovate in designing and implementing creative and innovative

learning processes. This is in line with current demands that, in general, universities are required to design and implement innovative learning processes so that students can obtain maximum course learning outcomes.

The learning process, especially in higher education, is generally dominated by hard skills and has not been balanced with soft skills regarding attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Developing hard skills is easier than soft skills, which tend to be complicated but challenging (Moore & Pearson, 2017). The soft skills identified as important in the workplace include communication, teamwork, motivation, problem-solving, enthusiasm, and trust (Dean & East, 2019). Developing student soft skills is a goal that is very difficult to achieve, especially in online learning, due to individual student differences and other elements that seem difficult to measure (Tadjer et al., 2022). It is universally acknowledged that soft skills are essential, but the concept becomes blurred when developing specific soft skills (Ahmad et al., 2021). The difficulty of developing soft skill abilities is also related to student satisfaction with participating in online learning. As many as 40.15% of students said they were dissatisfied, more than a quarter (28.15%) said they were satisfied, and 31.70% said they were not. Contributing factors include a lack of communication, interaction, and self-confidence between lecturers and students in discussing material (Susilowati et al., 2022).

So far, hard skills have been the main thing or have dominated the learning outcomes evaluated in learning. Students' soft skills abilities are neglected even though the demand for soft skills in the world of work shows a high increase compared to abilities in knowledge (Siddamal et al., 2020). The predominant focus on hard skills in educational evaluation has led to neglecting students' soft skills development despite the increasing demand for soft skills in the contemporary job market. This discrepancy indicates a potential gap in the emphasis on fostering soft skills compared to knowledge-based abilities.

Companies and institutions consider soft skills more important than other abilities. Among soft skills, it turns out that communication skills, work commitment, and collaboration skills are the most important for increasing workability (Succi & Canovi, 2020). Likewise, in education, soft skills must be balanced with hard skills. Soft skill abilities are very useful for a person's efficient performance (Adhiatma et al., 2019). Moreover, the high unemployment rate is also a consideration of the lack of high school soft skills. A study showed that the lack of soft skills of vocational high school graduates, accounting for 9.27% of the 131.55 million productive age people, is due to weak evaluation of the learning process. The focus is on hard skills, neglecting soft skills like creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration (Made Sudana et al., 2019).

Later on, research dealt with studies involving medical, physician assistant, physical therapy, and occupational therapy students and found that virtual learning may not be as effective in promoting interprofessional teamwork, communication, and role knowledge as in-person learning. Challenges such as missing out on in-person experiences, less engagement, lack of bonding, discomfort, and difficulty conversing were identified as primary hindrances. The study suggests assessing the utility of virtual interactive sessions in the context of other curriculum activities to ensure in-person opportunities for students to develop these skills (Herriott & McNulty, 2022).

While existing studies have underscored the challenges of developing soft skills like communication and teamwork in virtual learning environments (Herriott & McNulty, 2022; Tadjer et al., 2022), my research takes a novel approach by specifically investigating these processes within Universitas Terbuka's learning management system (LMS), Tuweb. Unlike conventional online platforms, Tuweb facilitates open and distance education, which may present unique opportunities and constraints for soft skills cultivation. Furthermore, my focus on understanding how Tuweb can balance soft skills development alongside hard skills acquisition addresses the identified gap between industry demands and traditional educational priorities (Siddamal et al., 2020). This contextualized exploration can pave the way for tailored pedagogical strategies that holistically prepare students for professional environments that increasingly value a synergy of technical and interpersonal competencies. For this reason, the research aims to investigate the

development of students' soft skills within the context of online learning at Universitas Terbuka's LMS, namely tutorial web (Tuweb).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Development of Soft skill

Developing soft skills in education is needed, especially in the learning process through online or blended learning (Yara & Taufik, 2021). Various studies have concluded that it is necessary to promote the development of technical and soft skills because these skills are essential for professional success and, as a result, are in high demand in new jobs (Fernández-Arias et al., 2021). The development of students' soft skills will improve overall learning. Students inevitably have to prepare themselves to enter the world of work, which does not only require hard skills. On the other hand, soft skills include cross-functional abilities such as those affecting a worker's communicative capacity, critical thinking, collaborative and social skills, and problem-solving abilities (Antón-Sancho et al., 2021). Thus, it is intended to balance hard and soft skills as learning demands change in the 21st century. 21st-century graduates are expected to be equipped with various skills, including collaboration, critical thinking, leadership, communication, group decision-making, negotiation skills, conflict resolution, team motivation, social skills, an understanding of diversity, and responsibility (Suryaningsih, 2021). Furthermore, Emanuel et al. (2021) describe several soft skill abilities as a basis for development in the learning process, which is visualized in the following chart and well-known by the Passport Model.
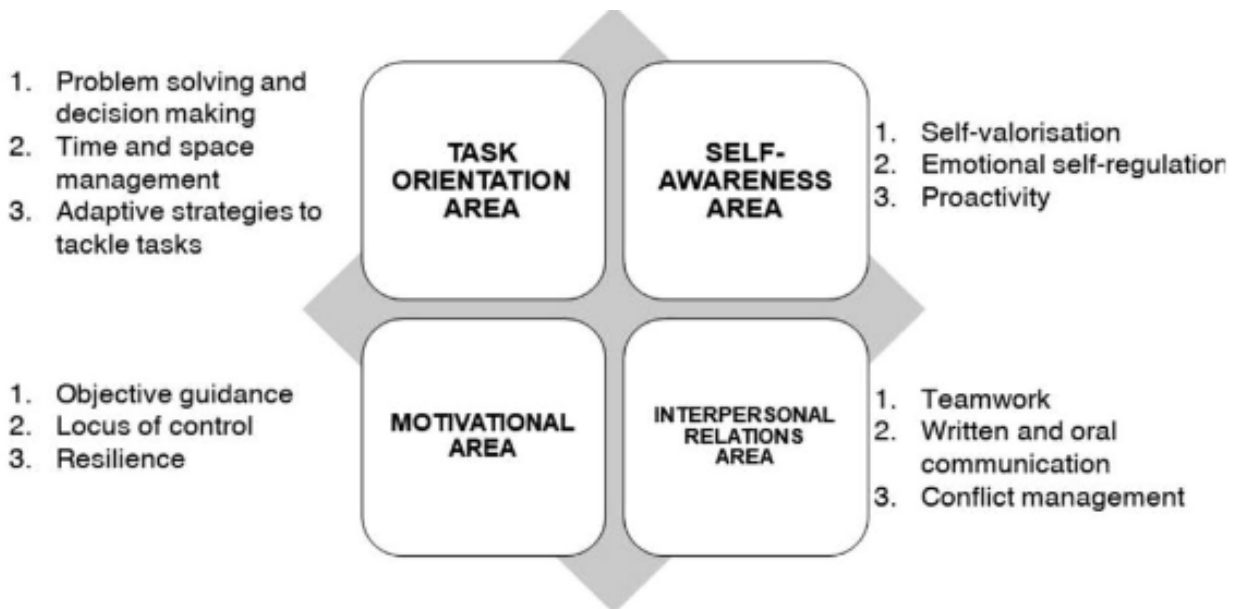

Figure 1. Aspects of Soft Skills
Source: Emanuel et al (2021)

The figure above shows that the first aspect relates to task orientation, which includes problem-solving and decision-making, space and time management, and adaptive task completion strategies. The second aspect of self-awareness includes self-assessment, self-emotional regulation, and a proactive attitude. The third aspect concerns the area of motivation, which includes objective guidance, locus of control/self-motivation, both internal and external, and self-reliance. The fourth aspect is the area of interpersonal relations, which includes cooperation, oral and written communication, and conflict management.

Focused on the fourth aspect of the chart above, one research highlighted the importance of enhancing students' soft skills in higher education, highlighting the need for institutions to rethink coaching methods

and focus on developing these skills to create job-ready graduates, a priority for employers (Pai & Mayya, 2022). Another research examines students' soft skills in learning support services, specifically webinar tutorials and online tutorials. It focuses on teamwork, communication, oral communication, and leadership. The research, conducted with 99 students, found that soft skills developed as expected, with teamwork and communication correlated with attendance and discussion. However, oral communication and leadership skills did not correlate with discussions and assignments (Nirmala et al., 2023).

Students' soft skills, including communication and teamwork, are crucial in higher education. Institutions should rethink coaching methods to create job-ready graduates. Research on webinar tutorials and online tutorials shows that teamwork and communication develop as expected, while oral communication and leadership skills do not. The two aspects of soft skills are described below.

Aspects of Soft Skill

Departing from the aspects described above, this research focuses more on the fourth aspect (interpersonal relation area), namely teamwork and communication aspects contained in the webinar Tuweb at UT's Postgraduate Program and strengthened by the results of previous research that has looked at all aspects of student soft skills in online learning. From the results of this study, it can be seen that only two aspects stand out, namely teamwork and communication. So, this research focuses more on the development of these two aspects.

The first aspect is teamwork. The ability to cooperate is one aspect of soft skills that needs to be developed, especially in online learning. This ability is very important for students in the work environment and life. Indicators of cooperation ability, namely the ability to: 1) work together in a team to achieve goals; 2) motivate members; 3) adjust to group dynamics; 4) avoid problems that are detrimental to the group; 5) overcome misunderstandings that exist within the team; and 6) solve problems within the team (Adhiatma et al., 2019).

The second aspect is communication. This aspect relates to strong communication skills, the ability to share knowledge, and a willingness to find time to support teamwork, for which all members must be accountable. Communication is simply the transmission of information from one person to another or from one group to another (Alawamleh et al., 2020). Good communication and effective collaboration can develop students' soft skills (Wings et al., 2021). Communication skills are basic things that are important and need to be owned by someone, especially in the world of work (Simpson et al., 2018). Through good communication skills, a person can express meaning to others to reach an agreement, and skills in using language and nonverbal communication reflect the skills of building effective communication. Adhiatma et al. (2019) stated that good communication skills are proven to improve work completion by having quality discussions with each other and avoiding misunderstandings and conflicts between individuals. A person's communication skills can be seen from several indicators, namely: 1) verbal; 2) written; 3) body gestures; 4) giving feedback to other people orally; 5) providing feedback in writing; 6) providing feedback with others through body gestures; 7) mutual understanding; and 8) reaching an agreement when communicating (Adhiatma et al., 2019).

Tutorial Web (Tuweb)

Universitas Terbuka (UT), a pioneer in distance education, provides learning support services in the form of tutorials consisting of online tutorials (Tuton), face-to-face (f2f) tutorials, webinar tutorials (Tuweb), radio tutorials, and TV tutorials. Beginning in 2020, UT hosts Tuweb, and Tuweb was founded in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that has ravaged Indonesia and other countries worldwide (Asiah, 2022). Belawati in Afriani (2007) said that tutorials are primarily used to explain course material that students do

not understand. Regarding the implementation of e-learning at UT, some adaptations and modifications were conducted in providing learning support services for students. A significant change is that face-to-face tutorials were not undergone for the first semester of 2020 since this tutorial mode cannot be implemented during the pandemic, and it has been changed to a synchronous online tutorial service, i.e., Tuweb (Darojat et al., 2023).

Tuweb is an alternative to face-to-face tutorials during the pandemic and is still dominated by hard skills development. However, the development of the two aspects of soft skills, namely teamwork, and communication, can be seen in Tuweb. Tuweb utilizes web seminar facilities via the Internet network and is carried out synchronously (in real-time or simultaneously). Tuweb allows tutors and students to interact simultaneously, even across the network (Asiah, 2022). It is held to improve service and efficiency in implementing Face-to-Face Tutorials (TTM), especially in geographically difficult areas (for example, student residences are spread out in various regions or abroad) and require high costs to organize them.

Moreover, Tuweb is one of the learning services offered by UT to its students. As a learning service that depends on internet signals, this learning service does not experience problems in its implementation. It is even very helpful for students in learning during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. As a blended learning service, it has become a popular choice for students who prefer distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A study analyzes student satisfaction with Tuweb using the Servqual dimension, revealing that students are satisfied with the service, with empathy being the key factor indicating excellence. To improve the service, Tuweb should offer responsiveness, speed accuracy, response times, and reliability (Masakazu et al., 2023). A study involving 1.185 students and 222 tutors found that Tuweb tutors met expected quality standards, with 71% of respondents having a good user experience and 77% having high satisfaction. Dependability and stimulation significantly affected user satisfaction (Mikaresti & Nurmalia, 2022).

METHODS

This descriptive research uses a qualitative approach. Descriptive research is a basic method for explaining events and situations precisely during their current state (Taherdoost, 2022). The qualitative research approach aims to collect primary, first-hand, textual data and analyze it using specific interpretive methods. Providing systematic research about phenomena aims to explore the correlation between them using observations or defining their attitudes (Taherdoost, 2022).

This research data was collected from two Tuweb classes from two UT Regional Offices (UPBJJ-UT), namely Bogor and Banjarmasin. Data collection through Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Creswell in Bridges (2023) said that focus group interviews are typically used to gather views from specific people. It involves collecting data through group interviews with 16 participants. FGDs were conducted to find more specific information on developing aspects of soft skills during learning activities through Tuweb. The FGD results were then transcribed and analyzed by thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a technique that involves giving the data codes, breaking the codes down into themes, and then analyzing and presenting the themes to provide a methodical description and interpretation of the meaning of the qualitative data based on Wæraas in the book chapter "*Researching Values: Methodological Approaches for Understanding Values Work in Organisations and Leadership*" with a chapter titled "*Thematic Analysis: Making values emerge from texts.*" The notions of codes and coding are central to the organized parts of thematic analysis. The procedure entails first classifying the data, then grouping the codes into themes, and frequently arranging them about one another during a second round of coding. The aggregate dimensions can be identified by adding a third coding round and then visualizing the codes and themes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A description of the development of the ability of two aspects of student soft skills in learning through Tuweb is as follows.

Teamwork

The first soft skill aspect is the ability to work in teams according to indicators 1) working in teams to achieve goals; 2) motivating members; 3) adjusting to group dynamics; 4) avoiding problems that are detrimental to the group; 5) overcoming misunderstandings that exist within the team; and 6) solving problems within the team (Adhiatma et al., 2019). The analysis results of developing aspects of the soft skills of cooperation carried out in the two Tuweb classes are as follows.

1. Working in Teams to Achieve Goals

Students are very enthusiastic about Tuweb with the desire to complete lectures on time together. Some even regretted that one of their friends was experiencing problems with Tuweb because the internet network was unstable in their area. This can be seen from the following student statements.

> *"Yes, one of our friends who rarely joins Tuweb, poor thing, his internet signal is not good."*

> *"The task is according to the assignment; do not let anyone miss out on speaking. Everyone gets a chance to speak."*

From the students' perception, the student statements provided evidence that students were dedicated to the common goal of collaboratively completing learning materials. Teamwork is closely related to team or group cooperation to achieve a goal (Cholis & Yulianti in Wiyono et al., 2022). Students demonstrated concern for inclusion and participation from all team members.

Moreover, students felt energized and motivated to work through Tuweb lectures at the same pace as a group rather than individually and attempted to assign equal chances to speak during group assignments and activities, showing intentional efforts to prevent any one student from dominating or being overlooked. There was no evidence that students prioritized individual goals over team cohesion. They changed activities and schedules to keep progress on track. A collective orientation in which no student is prioritized allowed for motivation, camaraderie, and reaffirmed commitment to overall team goals rather than individual advancement alone.

They also shared empathy and concern for a teammate experiencing internet/connectivity issues ("poor thing"), demonstrating concern for their teammate's participation and a desire that no one be left out. Overall, the students appeared to have established norms and behaviors that supported working collaboratively toward shared goals - completing assignments, making time for peer feedback, ensuring the inclusion of all voices, meeting deadlines together, and so on.

2. Motivating Members

There are no prominent group members, thus creating a minority member and harming others. One form of team members' cohesiveness is helping each other complete the tasks given. Students said that they have a motto to motivate each other as follows.

> "*Enter the Class Together, also Exit the Class Together.*"

With this motto, motivating each other is very prominent in teamwork. The motto implies that the students regard themselves as a cohesive group that works as a unit rather than individuals. They demonstrate solidarity by entering and exiting class together. Students motivating and assisting one another in completing tasks and assignments reinforce group cohesion. Rather than competing, they work together. Students with low digital literacy and motivation may have had less success in online learning environments (Yu, 2022). However, there are no prominent individual group members, and no one person is isolated or treated as a minority member. All group members can feel included with no single leader or star student. For example, assisting struggling teammates with coursework ensures that no one falls academically or socially behind. This prevents any individual group members from being harmed. Overall, the motto and the behaviors described indicate close-knit teamwork, inclusiveness, motivation, and collaboration among the participants.

3. Adjusting to Group Dynamics

Furthermore, building teamwork skills can be seen from the active participation of students in class by helping each other in learning activities such as doing assignments given. This can be seen from the statement of one of the students who said they reminded each other to do their assignments. Some students stated that they reminded each other to study the material and do the assignments the lecturer gave. One important thing is that in teamwork, no student dominates the group. This can be seen from the portion of student contributions when they are asked to complete group assignments. This is reflected in the statements of male students below.

> *"…even to make PowerPoint, you also must get parts so each one has to make and present. Everyone gets the same share as the division of the number of module pages. Only time limits us for presentations."*

From the student statements above, it can be said that all students must contribute to the Tuweb, and no student is left without a role. They allow each other to share suggestions and opinions on Tuweb. Student roles were reduced to conflicts with other competing roles, such as babysitting and cooking (Yu, 2022). From getting their respective roles in the group, each group member can adjust to the group dynamics. Active participation and helping behaviors in class (helping with assignments, reminding one another of deadlines and work to be completed) demonstrate group interdependence and willingness to support one another's learning.

The student's awareness of distributing responsibilities fairly is reflected in their sharing of contributions for group assignments, as demonstrated by the student's example of dividing up PPT slides. This keeps all members accountable while preventing any one student from dominating. In conclusion, these students exhibit adaptable teamwork and healthy group dynamics as evidenced by peer assistance, balanced workloads, coordination, and concern for inclusion and fairness among members.

4. Avoiding Problems that are Detrimental to the Group

Working together in a team on Tuweb is, of course, greatly influenced by the smooth running of the Tuweb itself. Learning activities through Tuweb run smoothly because a qualified system supports it. As one student said below.

> *"The learning system at UT is very good, so I am motivated to take courses at UT and finish college. The system can already back up my learning."*

The soft skill aspect of teamwork is crucial, as it involves achieving goals, motivating members, adjusting to group dynamics, avoiding problems, overcoming misunderstandings, and solving problems within the team. One way to solve the problem is for students to review peers' assignments, homework,

or online performance (Yu, 2022). The smooth running of Tuweb, a qualified system, greatly influences teamwork. Students are always present and active in class, helping each other with assignments and completing tasks. No student dominates the group, as seen in the proportion of student contributions. Everyone contributes equally to Tuweb, allowing for a balanced group dynamic. The motto "Enter The Class Together, Also Exit The Class Together" emphasizes the importance of motivating and helping each other complete tasks. This approach fosters cohesiveness among team members and prevents the creation of a minority group.

5. Overcoming Misunderstandings that Exist within the Team

The chat menu is also a means of solving problems during the learning process and overcoming misunderstandings within the team from tutors and fellow students. One female student said the following.

> " I had a discussion that had not been over-rated and asked the tutor to rate it. Sometimes, my friends explained why the tutor had not yet rated the task."

> "Tutors also provide important information via the message forum provided."

From the student's perception, some helpful insights can be said into how this team used communication to avoid and overcome potential misunderstandings. The chat functionality appeared to have been an important tool for students during learning sessions to resolve real-time confusion. Tutors and fellow students could use chat to explain concepts, assignments, and expectations.

Students relied on message boards for asynchronous questions and clarifications, where tutors could chime in and offer guidance at their own pace. Tutors greatly contribute to minimizing and overcoming student misunderstandings (Yu, 2022). This most likely helped students who had unanswered questions after the sessions ended. The student receiving explanatory feedback on an assignment grade from peers and tutors demonstrates how multiple communication channels were used to ensure comprehension. A multi-tiered support system prevented isolated misunderstandings.

6. Solving Problems within the Team

Students did not experience any problems during the Tuweb and can participate in all Tuweb activities from the first to the last. As one student said, almost all students were always present at Tuweb. Only one student was never present because of the internet signal. The one student with internet/attendance issues appears to be an isolated incident rather than an indicator of a broader issue. Moreover, this is the statement of a male student who is also a school principal.

> "There were almost no obstacles in learning depending on time management.".

From the statement above, it can be said that teamwork can occur in the classroom with several participants who can attend classes well. The male student/school principal's comment indicates that learning obstacles were minimized through good time management. This indicates that the team collaborated well to coordinate schedules, assign tasks, and manage workflows. Students did not appear to face significant issues or conflicts that required them to engage in significant problem-solving within their team. As well as Yu (2022) also said that students have been expected to cooperate with peers and teachers through online learning platforms. Most students' consistent attendance and participation in Tuweb sessions demonstrate commitment and confidence.

Taken together, this indicates that the team dynamics were already quite fluid. Students agreed on their objectives, responsibilities, and priorities. Because of this foundation, they could avoid major conflicts or obstacles that would have required complex problem-solving among team members.

Communication

Communication is vital in education, particularly during teaching and learning activities (Wiyono et al., 2022). In Tuweb, students do not only listen and pay attention to the material provided by tutors. They also communicate well with tutors and fellow students. Activities that require communication can be carried out throughout the learning process, which can be in the form of responding to the material provided, presenting assignments, and giving opinions to fellow Tuweb participants.

Student communication skills in Tuweb can be seen from several indicators, namely the ability to have or give: 1) verbal communication; 2) written communication; 3) body gestures; 4) feedback to other people orally; 5) feedback in writing; 6) feedback with others through body gestures; 7) mutual understanding; and 8) an agreement when communicating (Adhiatma et al., 2019).

1. Verbal Communication

The communication among students and lecturers is in verbal communication in Tuweb. It can be seen from the student statement below.

> "*Some of our responses are not considered opinions.*"

The above statement is one of many communications among students and lecturers. A female student said that students' responses are not considered opinions. This could mean that some responses are factual statements rather than subjective opinions in a conversation or discussion. The student was pointing out that not everything said is an opinion.

> *"At the beginning, we respond; at the end, we listen more."*

Moreover, she continued her statement that she and other students sometimes did not have time to respond to the discussion at the end of the class. This statement commented when she was asked when the student would respond to the lecturer's comments. She described a conversation pattern where people respond more at the start when introducing ideas but listen more toward the end as the other person elaborates. It shows an awareness of taking turns in dialogue.

In verbal communication, students also understand each other by not dominating other students. They stated that no one was dominant, and all Tuweb participants got the same portion. This can be seen from the student statements below.

> "*Yes, you can. No one is dominant. There is no difference. No different backgrounds of students.*"

Each student has the opportunity to communicate in Tuweb equally and to support the development of communication aspects in Tuweb. Students must use polite language, follow good speech rules, and use effective language. During learning, students were asked to respond by asking the lecturer or other participants using polite language. One student stated the following.

> *"During the learning activity, I listened more to other friends; they used organized language, and their sentences were understandable. So, learn from friends, too. Because we are also teachers."*

Most participants are teachers, so they can use formal, polite language and follow good and correct language rules while communicating. Furthermore, they can politely express opinions, as stated by the following students.

> "*At least I am just adding, yes. I think it is better this way. So, it is not frontal. We arrange the language.*"

> *"No one forces the will. Alternatively, some friends talked for a long time; then, we reminded them to remember the time so other friends would have time. We reprimanded him gently."*

In addition to language politeness, as seen in the statement above, students also used effective language. This condition is very influential in the continuity of the Tuweb to understand the lecture's material. Students are required to communicate effectively, and they could apply it even though almost all students have never learned how to communicate effectively. They said they did it because they studied independently, as stated by the following students.

> *"Never. I have just learned to give feedback. I am also a newbie..hehe…."*

> *"I have not, self-taught."*

> *"Just paying attention to friends."*

> *"We are just more sensitive if we say like this so that it will be like this or something."*

The ability to communicate effectively was not studied specifically by students. They learn self-taught which can be learned from friends' speech styles or paying attention to their communication habits so far. Of course, these communication skills are very much needed in learning both in presentations which require not only language skills to convey material but also involve skills in presenting the material so that it looks attractive and sounds 'good' in presentation. This can be done well by students when given a task presentation assignment. Students can do this well according to their statement that preparation is important before doing Tuweb.

Another condition that supports oral communication during Tuweb is the material provided by the lecturer. As said by the students, they discussed what had to do with the material, discussed more about modules, and answers to assignments that had been given before. Even though the material provided in Tuweb can be in videos or other sources that students must understand, communication activities still occur outside of Tuweb activities, such as in the WhatsApp (WA) group. They do this more often because of time constraints on Tuweb. So, it can be said that apart from spoken language, students also use written language to maintain the Tuweb learning process. Thus, it can be concluded that while participating in Tuweb, students can communicate verbally properly, following the language rules among participants and tutors, and communicate in writing via WhatsApp to connect.

Finally, in Tuweb, students communicate verbally with their lecturers and peers, demonstrating a pattern of taking turns in dialogue and understanding each other without dominating. Students support the development of communication skills by using polite language, adhering to good speech rules, and using effective language. They observe their friends' communication habits and learn self-taught communication skills from their friends' speech styles.

Effective language is critical for the continuity of the Tuweb learning process because it helps students understand the lecturer's material. Students also discuss the lecturer's material, including modules and assignment answers. Due to time constraints on Tuweb, communication activities occur outside of Tuweb activities, such as in the WhatsApp (WA) group.

To summarize, Tuweb students can communicate verbally while adhering to language rules and communicate in writing via WA to connect. They also learn effective language use necessary for learning and presenting material. The importance of preparation and effective communication in the Tuweb learning process is demonstrated by students' self-taught communication skills, which are essential for effective learning and presentation.

2. Written Communication

Mostly, the communication between students and lecturers is in written communication in a discussion forum some statements are below.

> *"Communicate via chat. In discussions, we can chat, and you can use messages to tutors."*

One male student said that the students communicate via chat with the lecturer. It means that communication can occur not just face-to-face, but also through written channels like chat/messaging in forum discussion. They recognize that discussions can happen synchronously via chat, and students can communicate with the lecturer over messages asynchronously. This shows an awareness that communication has expanded to include digital written forms beyond just spoken dialogue. The student understands that chatting/messaging are viable ways to communicate verbally in an academic setting without always needing to talk in person.

> *"We comment more on Saturdays and Sundays."*

Another statement was about the time when the students communicated in forum discussions. The statement implies that students participate more actively in written discussions on weekends than on weekdays, perhaps due to having more free time on weekends.

> *"The lecturer was also assigned to add material sources from Google Scholar or Garuda."*

Moreover, other students gave the statement above. This indicates that the lecturer assigned students to add sources for their material from Google Scholar or Garuda, which are academic search engines. The student demonstrates that verbal communication in an academic context involves citing credible sources.

In summary, students increasingly use digital communication to engage lecturers in discussions, including chat and messaging. This shift in communication is not limited to face-to-face interactions but extends to synchronous and asynchronous interactions. Students are more active in written discussions during weekends, possibly due to their free time. Additionally, they cite credible sources from academic search engines like Google Scholar or Garuda, demonstrating their understanding of the importance of written communication in academic settings. This shift in communication demonstrates the growing acceptance of digital forms in academic settings.

3. Body Gestures

Body gesture is a part of body language. A review of the literature reveals that some academics use the terms "nonverbal communication" and "body language" interchangeably (Al Tawil, 2019). Body language is a type of nonverbal communication that includes body posture, gestures, facial expressions, eye movements, voice intonation, and other characteristics (Hrisca, 2011). Below is the explanation for the student's body gestures in Tuweb.

In Tuweb, students and lecturers cannot rely on physical body gestures and facial expressions to convey meaning. Without in-person visual cues, they must find other ways to express ideas and reactions through limited options like emojis, text formatting, punctuation, or capital letters. Misunderstandings may happen more easily.

The students and lecturer recognized that the lack of visible body language in online communication compared to in-person interactions introduces certain challenges and requires adaptions to ensure ideas are conveyed clearly without those non-verbal cues. This demonstrates awareness of how communication changes in online settings.

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Shortly, body gestures are a form of nonverbal communication, including body posture, facial expressions, eye movements, and voice intonation. In online settings like Tuweb, students and lecturers must use emojis, text formatting, punctuation, or capital letters to convey ideas and reactions. This lack of visible body language presents challenges and requires adaptations to ensure clear communication, demonstrating awareness of communication changes in online settings.

4. Feedback to Other People Orally

Students actively communicate while learning, either orally or in writing. Because all members have the same opportunity to communicate, they can all take advantage of it. Students stated that they could communicate the assignments via the Internet. The following are student statements about providing oral feedback in Tuweb. As stated by the two students below.

> *"Giving each other the chance to talk, everyone has to talk."*

Students could communicate and provide feedback orally during online learning via the Tuweb platform. Everyone was able to participate and provide feedback. Students believed they were given equal opportunities to express themselves and complete their assignments. In other words, students could complement one another and share perspectives through oral communication. Because of the collaborative process, they could build on each other's ideas. As a result, all members were able to participate and engage actively.

> *"I have given criticism, suggestions, praise. We gave each other suggestions and input."*

One male student said that he had given feedback to other students and got feedback from other students, as well. This indicates that the student has experience providing peers with evaluative oral feedback, including critique, recommendations, and complimentary remarks. It shows they understand feedback as an interactive process of offering input to others verbally.

> *"Some of our responses are not considered opinions."*

Moreover, the student said he gave feedback to his friend in Tuweb. The student recognizes that effective feedback should involve objective assessments, not just subjective opinions. Giving constructive criticism or praise requires specific observational evidence.

> *"Usually, we are informed that assignment one has been graded."*

The added statement above is about task grading. The student verbally describes and gives updates or notifications about assessment outcomes and progress. Sharing assignment grades demonstrates part of oral feedback as conveying evaluative results.

> *"Then informed others about the material's keywords...module 1 or module 2."*

One student also gave some feedback about materials. The student indicates that oral feedback can highlight important concepts from learning materials or modules. By notifying peers of key terms, they are helping reinforce knowledge.

> *"Friends are given a portion to talk to. We complement each other. It is just that there is less response from friends from Kalimantan because of the bad signal."*

Another point that students made was about technical difficulties. Mulyanto (2021) stated that many Indonesians have found it difficult to participate in online learning due to unequal access to technology and Internet connectivity (cited from: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/2/how-students-teachers-in-indonesia-cope-with-online-learning). Some students, however, noted that poor internet

connectivity made it difficult for those in remote areas such as Kalimantan to respond and participate in discussions actively. Due to technical difficulties, some students were unable to participate.

From the comments above, students actively communicate via the Tuweb platform during online learning, allowing equal opportunities to express themselves and complete assignments. This collaborative process allows students to participate and build on each other's ideas actively. However, technical difficulties, such as poor internet connectivity, limit some students' engagement. Online oral communication enables participatory learning, but technical limitations may hinder remote students from fully participating. Students provide feedback to peers through various forms, including criticism, suggestions, and praise. They recognize that effective feedback should involve objective assessments and specific observational evidence. Students also provide updates or notifications about assignment grades and highlight important concepts from learning materials or modules, reinforcing knowledge. Overall, online oral communication facilitates collaborative feedback exchange, but technical limitations may limit participation for remote students.

5. Feedback in Writing

In addition to completing the assessment given in the form of exercises and assignments, students were also asked to provide feedback on the material provided. The feedback given was to find out the extent of their understanding and to trigger student curiosity. One student said as below.

> *"Sometimes sharing experiences. We did not just discuss modules. We were very enthusiastic about preparing ourselves before the Tuweb class."*

Students stated that they gave positive feedback because they were enthusiastic about learning. The feedback provided not only discusses the material but also shares experiences. This has a positive impact on student readiness for each meeting. The discussion forum is meaningful to both lecturers and students. Belows are also some statements of the students dealing with written feedback.

> *"In discussions, we like to give each other input. Respond and express opinions."*

One male student said the students gave each other inputs, responses, and opinions. This comment highlights that students appreciate the collaborative nature of discussions on Tuweb. They can provide feedback to one another, respond, and share opinions. This allows for productive discussion.

> *"We are indeed facilitated to discuss through discussions."*

Another female student added that the students helped each other through forum discussion. This reiterates that the discussion forums facilitate meaningful conversations between students. The platform enables back-and-forth discussion.

> *"Tutors also provide important information via the message forum provided."*

In Tuweb, lecturers must provide feedback on students' posts or comments. One female student said that her lecturer provided some feedback on their posts. This comment shows that the lecturer is key in providing information to students through the message forums. Students find this information helpful.

> *"Have studied effective communication and applied it in communication during Tuweb."*

The most important point of giving feedback in writing is using polite language. Gender differences in character might explain why female students performed better in providing affective peer feedback in online learning environments (Ranjbaran et al., 2023). However, in Tuweb, most students said they used polite language in responding to each other. The statement above indicates that male and female

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students have already provided principles of effective communication and applied them when interacting on Tuweb. This demonstrates using the platform to practice skills.

In summary, students on Tuweb provided feedback on their understanding and curiosity through exercises and assignments. They expressed enthusiasm for learning and shared experiences, enhancing their readiness for class. Discussion forums on Tuweb were beneficial for both students and lecturers. Students appreciated the collaborative nature of discussions, allowing for input, response, and sharing of opinions. They also appreciated the platform's ability to facilitate back-and-forth discussions. Lecturers also provided valuable information through message forums, which students found helpful. Students also applied effective communication principles, using polite language in their responses. Overall, Tuweb's interactive features were valued by students, demonstrating the platform's benefits for discussion, feedback, and information exchange.

6. Feedback with Others Through Body Gestures

The feedback is sometimes given by expression as one female student said below.

> *"I am confused if I am given time to ask, hehe. We need to be provoked to give feedback."*

The lecturer usually provides sufficient time for asking questions. From the statement above, the student responded by showing a confused expression. Her body language likely conveyed this confusion, with facial expressions and gestures consistent with feeling unsure. The body language is the feedback from students in the form of gestures. Gestures improve the learning effect when teachers and learners use them during the learning process (Kremser et al., 2021). The feedback is important in Tuweb but students need to be strongly encouraged or "provoked" to provide feedback. It can be concluded that this expression emphasizes how body language, facial expressions, or gestures act as important forms of feedback between lecturers and students during live Tuweb sessions.

7. Mutual Understanding

The following is the analysis of the student's comment related to mutual understanding.

> *"There is feedback from Tuweb. There is reinforcement from the lecturers as to what we did wrong and what the solution is."*

Students agreed that there is feedback from lecturers in discussion forums. Lecturers' feedback might help grasp the depth they discuss and construct knowledge (Rochera et al., 2021). One student said that the feedback was reinforcement from lecturers. The lecturers provided constructive feedback by pointing out what was incorrect and offering improvement solutions. This demonstrates that the lecturers took the time to understand why the students were struggling and to fill in the gaps. The lecturers fostered mutual understanding by directly identifying mistakes and providing guidance. The students who received detailed feedback on errors and solutions had the impression that the lecturers understood their needs and how to assist them.

A shared comprehension is formed through mutual understanding of what the students are doing incorrectly and what content or skills require improvement. As a result, the remark emphasizes how specific, constructive feedback fosters mutual understanding between students and lecturers. The lecturers clearly understand the student's needs by identifying areas for correction and providing guidance. This allows both parties to be on the same page regarding strengths, weaknesses, and potential areas for improvement.

8. An Agreement when Communicating

The ability to reach an agreement through communication is critical to effective teamwork. This is in line with recent research, which shows that one of the key predictors of good teamwork is the ability for vulnerable communication in casual and non-work-related interactions (De-Visser et al., 2019). The following is an analysis of the student comments.

> *"There are advantages and disadvantages. It seems like communication is one way but like being billed for assignments that have not been collected yet."*

The above is one female student's comment. The student recognized the benefits and drawbacks of communication in the course. She believed that communication was primarily one-way or lecturer-driven. She did appreciate, however, that the lecturer followed up on missed work by "billing" or reminding students of assignments.

> *"Appreciate the lecturer by responding."*

She continued by saying that she appreciated the lecturer's response to her comments in the discussion forum. By responding in turn, the student expressed appreciation for the lecturer's communication efforts. This demonstrates mutual recognition of the value of two-way communication. The student keeps their end of the bargain.

In conclusion, while the students believe the lecturers initiate most of the interaction, they recognize the lecturers' efforts to prompt the students to communicate by checking on assignments. The students then describe their efforts to respond to the lecturers and reciprocate communication. This indicates that both parties are working to establish open, two-way communication channels through mutual understanding and agreement on the importance of both sides' engagement.

Discussion

This study provides valuable insights into the development of critical soft skills of teamwork and communication through online learning platforms in Universitas Terbuka's Tuweb. The findings demonstrate that carefully designed online activities can effectively cultivate these essential skills alongside academic knowledge. Online activities can be delivered through various forms, including voice, photos, and videos. Media availability to capture and edit these forms of activities is very important in preparing for online classes (Jeong & So, 2020). Students reported experiencing collaborative teamwork, inclusive participation, constructive communication, and mutual understanding during Tuweb sessions. They engaged in positive interdependence, divided roles equitably, motivated each other, solved problems, provided feedback, and demonstrated awareness of adapting communication styles to the online format. These results suggest that thoughtfully structured online learning need not be limited to hard skills, but can meaningfully develop soft skills that employers highly prize. This result follows Law et al. (2019) opinion, which states that engaging students in online learning can enhance their skills, particularly in fostering communication with peers and lecturers, establishing social connections, and fostering a productive work ethic.

The research highlights useful strategies to foster soft skills development through online learning more intentionally. Providing training for tutors on integrating soft skills practice into online tutorials is recommended. Designing activities for applied skill-building, like group presentations and peer feedback sessions, would allow students to demonstrate competencies tangibly. Establishing clear guidelines and rubrics around appropriate language use and discussion participation can shape expectations. Enabling

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multidirectional feedback between students and tutors on soft skills growth is crucial. Utilizing multiple communication channels like voice, video, and emoticons can compensate for the lack of non-verbal cues online. Overcoming access barriers by ensuring full participation regardless of connectivity issues is important for inclusion. Sharing effective practices across disciplines would facilitate broader online soft skills cultivation implementation. Implementing such strategies can unlock the potential of online learning to more comprehensively develop the essential interpersonal abilities demanded in today's workforce.

CONCLUSION

The study found promising evidence that online team activities and discussions on Tuweb improved students' teamwork and communication abilities. Students helped struggling teammates, divided work fairly, motivated each other, solved problems together, communicated politely, adapted to a lack of non-verbal cues, and reached a mutual understanding. Overall, Tuweb activities effectively developed these soft skills alongside academic knowledge for online learners. This demonstrates the potential of carefully designed online learning to cultivate valuable collaboration and communication competencies.

To further understand and enhance soft skills development through online platforms like Tuweb, future research could extend the study to include undergraduate students or those from other universities, allowing for comparisons across different educational contexts. Collecting data at multiple points throughout the term (beginning, middle, and end) would enable assessing the trajectory of soft skill growth over time. Involving lecturers in interviews or focus groups, in addition to student perspectives included in the current study, could provide valuable insights from those facilitating and observing the soft skills cultivation process through Tuweb. Examining potential differences in soft skill development between synchronous Tuweb sessions and asynchronous online forums could inform the optimal design of online learning activities. Incorporating quantitative survey data on soft skill development alongside the existing qualitative findings could provide quantifiable evidence of progress, supplementing the rich experiential data. Implementing these suggestions would yield a more comprehensive understanding and enable data-driven improvements to deliberately foster essential teamwork, communication, and other soft skills in online learning environments.

To cultivate soft skills like teamwork and communication through online learning platforms more intentionally, key recommendations include providing lecturers with training and resources to integrate soft skills development into online tutorials deliberately. Creating activities where students must practice and demonstrate specific soft skills, such as group presentations or peer feedback sessions, would allow applied skill-building. Establishing guidelines for appropriate language use and providing rubrics for effective discussion participation could help set expectations. Including mechanisms for students to receive feedback on their soft skill development areas is crucial for growth. Encouraging emoticons, voice messages, or videos can help compensate for the lack of nonverbal cues in online communication. Overcoming barriers like poor connectivity by utilizing multiple communication channels can enable full participation. Promoting successful soft skills development strategies across faculties can facilitate knowledge-sharing and implementation. Implementing such recommendations would allow online learning platforms to more deliberately and effectively foster essential teamwork, communication, and other vital soft skills for student success.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

spend their time and thoughts during data collection. We declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The author confirms that the data and content of the article are free from plagiarism.

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