

# IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF SOFT SKILLS TRAINING FOR STUDENTS OF DONG NAI TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY

Nguyen Thanh Dang Khoa<sup>1</sup>, Vu Hong Van<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Dong Nai Technology University*

<sup>2</sup>*University of Transport and Communications*

\*Corresponding author: *Vu Hong Van, vanvh\_ph@utc.edu.vn*

## GENERAL INFORMATION

Received date: 16/11/2024

Revised date: 11/3/2025

Accepted date: 21/3/2025

## KEYWORD

*Dong Nai Technology University;*

*Improve quality;*

*Mixed methods;*

*Preliminary positive result;*

*Soft skills training;*

*Students.*

## ABSTRACT

Soft skills training for students is one of the important contents in the comprehensive training process for students, good at professional knowledge, good soft skills and positive attitudes. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the current status of soft skills training for students, find out the shortcomings, limitations, and causes of the deficiencies; from there, propose solutions to improve the quality of soft skills training for students of Dong Nai Technology University to improve the comprehensive training quality of the University. In this study, 198 people who participated in the survey were managers, lecturers, and students; including 101 people at Dong Nai Technology University and 97 people at some universities in Ho Chi Minh City. The sample was selected for semi-structured interviews using the convenience method, the sample size was 17 people including 04 managers, 05 lecturers, and 08 students. The results showed that soft skills training for students in general and students of Dong Nai University of Technology in particular has achieved positive results, however, there are still some shortcomings and limitations that need to be further overcome. From that reality, this study proposes some solutions to improve the quality of soft skills training for students of Dong Nai Technology University in the coming time.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background to the study

The specialized knowledge that universities provide to students during their studies is a decisive factor in helping students to establish a career in the future. However, the question is whether that specialized knowledge is enough to help students

overcome difficulties and challenges in a future that no one can predict, in a world that is changing every day. Therefore, universities need to prepare their students with the knowledge, professional skills, and specialized knowledge, and one of those the luggage is soft skills.

According to the World Economic Forum (2023), the past few years have been shaped

by a challenging combination of health, economic and geopolitical fluctuations combined with increasing social and environmental pressures. These accelerating changes have and continue to reshape the global labor market and shape the needs for jobs and skills of the future. Previously, in April 2012, the Australian Government launched the “Skills for Australia” report. This report is worth about 1.75 million AUD (equivalent to about 26 billion VND) to reform vocational education and training (Australian Government, 2012). The report is a synthesis of references on skills, from why skills are needed, how to train to acquire skills and why individuals and countries will gain great benefits if the workforce is skilled and highly skilled. In Asia, research and development on soft skills have been very active in recent years. In the early years of the 21st century, interest in the field of soft skills and other related skills has grown in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. In Asian countries, the demand for skilled labor is increasing, while high economic growth rates bring about the need for new skills (World Bank, 2015).

Today, in Vietnam, most different occupations have their requirements for soft skills, in addition to professional knowledge to assess the ability as well as select graduates for job positions. In the EMVITET project (Empowering Vietnamese VET Teachers for Transformation towards Education 4.0), the importance of soft skills was also identified when identifying essential competencies in Education 4.0. This has also been demonstrated in the legal documents of the State (Vietnam) when regulating the output standards of training programs, and the orientation for fundamental and comprehensive innovation of education, specifically as follows:

Circular No. 07/2015/TT-BGDDT dated April 16, 2015, stipulates the minimum amount of knowledge, and capacity requirements that learners achieve after graduation for each training level of higher

education and the process of building, appraising, and promulgating training programs as follows: “Output standards are the minimum requirements for knowledge, skills, attitudes, and professional responsibilities that learners achieve after completing the training program, committed by the training institution to learners, society, and publicly announced along with conditions to ensure implementation” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

Circular No. 12/2017/TT-BGDDT on the quality assessment of higher education institutions has determined: “Expected Learning Outcome is the minimum requirement for knowledge, skills, level of autonomy and personal responsibility that learners achieve after completing the training program, committed by the educational institution to learners, society and publicly announced along with conditions to ensure implementation” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2017)

Circular No. 17/2021/TT-BGDDT dated June 22, 2021, of the Minister of Education and Training regulating training program standards; Developing, evaluating and promulgating training programs for all levels of higher education, the output standards of the training program are explained as follows: “Output standards are requirements for the qualities and abilities of learners after completing a training program, including minimum requirements for knowledge, skills, autonomy and responsibility of learners upon graduation” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2021).

The XIII<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam has determined: “Training people in the direction of ethics, discipline, discipline, sense of civic and social responsibility; having life skills, working skills, foreign languages, information technology, digital technology, creative thinking and international integration” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 233).

Thus, training soft skills for students is an important issue in the context of globalization and international integration. In most universities across the country, for students to fully meet the graduation requirements, universities are required to equip basic and advanced soft skills so that students can quickly integrate into the labor market and professional life after graduation.

## 1.2. Research problem

During the training process, Dong Nai Technology University (hereinafter referred to as the University or DNTU) has recognized the significance and importance of soft skills in comprehensive education for students, meeting the output standards for graduates. In addition to equipping students with basic professional knowledge, DNTU has equipped many necessary soft skills so that students can quickly integrate into professional life and new social relationships. Some soft skills that have been trained by DNTU include Public speaking skills; Emotional management skills; Communication and relationship-building skills and Negotiation skills, which are implemented from semester 1 to semester 4, each semester will train one skill for students. With the efforts of the University, the results have been relatively positive, and well-evaluated by learners and society.

However, in the training process, although the University is interested in training soft skills for students, it has not met the needs of students. Partly, due to the nature of the majors, with a lot of pressure and the need to spend a lot of time on professional knowledge, many students have very little habit of cultivating soft skills for themselves through social and community activities. Moreover, in the learning process, the University and lecturers focus mainly on training specialized knowledge, paying little attention to equipping students with soft skills. When applying for jobs at businesses or government agencies, new graduates are very confused in expressing themselves and their knowledge, others think

that they are too good at their major and self-assess themselves beyond their ability, leading to failure in the interview and recruitment process. Sometimes when recruited, businesses have to retrain soft skills. Therefore, soft skills training must be identified as necessary, mandatory and must be considered mandatory content in the training program, so that when graduates can meet the requirements of businesses and society.

## 1.3. Research focus

To comprehensively evaluate the soft skills training process of DNTU, this study focuses on researching and clarifying the following basic issues: (i) Assessing the importance of soft skills training for students at DNTU; (ii) Recognizing the position, role of soft skills training for students at DNTU; (iii) Current status level of interest in soft skills training for students at DNTU; (iv) Current status of soft skills training activities for students at DNTU; (v) Some assessments (results, limitations, and causes); (vi) Solutions to improve the quality of soft skills training for students at DNTU.

## 1.4. Research aim

The objective of this study is to point out some shortcomings, limitations and causes of shortcomings and limitations in the process of soft skills training based on a survey and assessment of the current status of soft skills training for students of DNTU in the past. At the same time, to propose solutions to improve the quality of soft skills training for students at DNTU in the coming time, based on the survey and correct assessment of the current status of soft skills training for students at DNTU, this study has surveyed several universities that have similarities with DNTU in Ho Chi Minh City. The selection of these universities for the survey in the section “Assessing the level of interest in soft skills training for students” helps to have a practical basis for comparing the survey results at DNTU, thereby having appropriate solution orientations.

## 1.5. Literature review

### *Skills:*

In fact, there are many different concepts when talking about the definition of “skills”: “Skills are the application of knowledge in activities” (Tuyen, 1999, p. 28); “Skills are the ability to effectively apply knowledge about the method of action that has been acquired by the subject to perform corresponding tasks” (Dung, 2000, p. 36). According to VietnamWork (2023), skills are the application of knowledge and understanding received by people to perform a certain job; they can be applied in communication, emotions, technical work, expertise, survival ability, etc. From the previously published viewpoints, based on observation and research, “skills” can be understood as follows: Skills are the ability to perform an action or activity by selecting and applying the right knowledge and methods of action to achieve the set goals.

### *Soft skills:*

According to Forland and Jeremy (2006), soft skills are skills related to people’s interactions with others (groups, collectives, organizations, communities, etc.); this interaction is demonstrated through people’s use of communication language, attitudes and effective behavior between people. Skills related to emotional intelligence, affecting the establishment of relationships between people, will be soft skills (Loc & Thoa, 2010). Based on previously published soft skills concepts and from observation and research, the concept of “soft skills” can be understood as follows: Soft skills are skills that belong to human personality, not innate factors. Soft skills are not fixed, formed and developed through each person’s experience. Soft skills help people interact with people around them, supporting knowledge and professional skills.

### *Soft skills for students:*

Soft skills are not only for a certain industry or major but are used in all areas of social life. Marcial (2012) believes that soft skills are not innate but can be learned.

According to Lucia and Lepsinger (1999) soft skills can be upgraded through training. Therefore, Patacsil and Tablatin (2017) argued that soft skills should be included in the curriculum. From several research results on necessary soft skills (Bronson, 2007; Loc & Thoa, 2010; Marcel, 2012; Hoa, 2014; Lai., et al., 2021; Nguyen, 2021 & 2022), it is shown that soft skills are considered necessary by many universities around the world and universities in Vietnam for graduates after graduation and working in the 21st century: Learning and self-study skills; Presentation skills; Communication and behavioral skills; Problem-solving skills; Self-leadership and personal image skills; Creative and adventurous thinking skills; Planning and organizing work skills; Teamwork skills; Negotiation skills; Listening skills.

Based on the results of research projects and the actual situation in the current training process at DNTU, we propose and add “Science and technology application skills” to the list of necessary soft skills for graduates. Because of the rapid development of science and technology today, if students of DNTU do not have science and technology application skills, they will quickly fall behind society and cannot meet job requirements. Moreover, the strength of DNTU is science and technology. Therefore, adding “Science and technology application skills” will have many advantages in training students.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Research design

In terms of qualitative data, previous studies have provided a relatively complete and comprehensive system of theoretical issues related to soft skills training for students. In terms of quantitative data, the questionnaire system designed to conduct surveys for all three subjects: managers, lecturers, and students at DNTU and some universities in Ho Chi Minh City is an important basis, ensuring the authenticity of research data. A semi-structured interview

with managers, lecturers, and students used in the study allows for the collection of qualitative data on soft skills training activities for students.

## 2.2. Research context

This study was conducted at Dong Nai Technology University, Trang Dai Ward, Bien Hoa City, Dong Nai Province. As one of the Southeast region's leading private universities, the institution enrolls over 5,000 students from across the country, specializing in various fields of study. This university is preparing for the status of a class university in the Southern region and the whole of Vietnam by improving human resources, infrastructure, quality control, improving the quality of human resource training, etc. One of the typical activities is to improve the quality of soft skills training for students. In addition, to have comparative data, to have objective comments and assessments and to propose necessary solutions, this article also surveyed some famous universities in Ho Chi Minh City.

## 2.3. Participants

The accessible participants in this study are 198 managers, teachers and students, specifically: 101 people at DNTU (including 07 managers, 13 teachers and 81 students) and 97 people at some universities in Ho Chi Minh City that have points in common with DNUT (including 06 managers, 11 lecturers and 80 students). These are people who are closely related to soft skills training activities as both recipients and those who directly participate in the process of managing and training soft skills for students. Therefore, their assessments are both accurate and ensure a correct assessment of the current situation of soft skills training for students. However, with this number of surveys, it is not possible to represent all managers, lecturers and students. This leads to the fact that errors and comments cannot cover all the content and thus needs to be assessed and continuously researched in the future.

## 2.4. Survey method

The study was conducted mainly using quantitative research methods with the survey tool being a questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was built based on soft skills training activities for students. The interview form for managers, lecturers, and students included content related to the current status of soft skills education activities for students at DNTU. For universities in Ho Chi Minh City, only the “awareness of the importance” and “position and role” of soft skills training for students were surveyed.

Questionnaire design related to the following issues: (i) Assessment of the importance of soft skills training for students at DNTU; (ii) Awareness of the position, and role of soft skills training for students at DNTU; (iii) Current status of interest in soft skills training for students at DNTU; (iv) Current status of soft skills training activities for students at DNTU; (v) Some assessments (results, limitations, problems and causes); (vi) Solutions to improve the quality of soft skills training for students at DNTU.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 04 managers coded from CBQL1 - CBQL4; 05 lecturers coded from GV1 - GV5, and 08 students coded from SV1 - SV8. With the diversity of interview subjects, it will provide comprehensive assessments of the research problem. In which, the interview topic focuses on items (i), (ii), (iii), (iv) and part of item (vi). However, with the small number of interviews, there will be certain limitations. Increasing the number of interviewees will be a suggestion for further studies.

## 2.5. Convention of measurement scale and data processing

Scale convention: The scale used mainly in survey forms is the nominal scale to identify the name and some characteristics of the survey object; the ordinal scale and interval scale to calculate parameters in descriptive



statistics such as average value, and percentage.

The information collected from the survey questionnaire is based on the average value on a 4-point Likert scale with an interval value to facilitate the evaluation and analysis of data reasonably and scientifically.  $= (\text{Maximum} - \text{Minimum})/n = (5-1)/5 = 0.8$ , so the average values in the scale are conventionally according to Table 1. Dividing the assessment level into 05 different levels will allow for a wide range of assessment results; as a basis for accurate assessment of research results.

**Table 1.** Conventions for processing survey information

Medium score	$1.00 \leq \bar{X} \leq 1.80$	$1.81 \leq \bar{X} \leq 2.60$	$2.61 \leq \bar{X} \leq 3.40$	$3.41 \leq \bar{X} \leq 4.20$	$4.21 \leq \bar{X} \leq 5.0$
Conventional points	1	2	3	4	5
Critical level	Not important	Less important	Rather important	Important	Very important
Level of implementation	Total disagree	Disagree	Partially agree	Agree	Very agree
Level of interest	Not necessary	Less necessary	Rather necessary	Necessary	Very necessary

Processing survey data: Use the formula to calculate the average score:

$$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k X_i K_i}{n} \quad (1).$$

where,  $\bar{X}$  is the medium score;  $X_i$  is the score at level  $i$ ;  $K_i$  is the number of participants rated at the  $X_i$  level;  $n$  is the number of people participating in the assessment.

Meaning of using  $\bar{X}$ : The average score in statistical results represents the level of representation according to a certain quantity criterion of the total including many units of the same type. The average score reflects the average level of the phenomenon, and at the same time compares two (or more) total phenomena of the same kind, not of the same scale.

The number of surveys will be specified as frequency (abbreviated as Fre), and will also be converted to a percentage (%).

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Current awareness of soft skills training for Dong Nai Technology University students

##### 3.1.1. Assessment of the importance of soft skills training for Dong Nai Technology University students

Theoretical and practical studies have shown the importance of soft skills training for students. To properly assess the awareness of the importance of soft skills training for DNTU students, this study conducted a survey of 101 people. The survey contents and results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Results of assessment of the importance of soft skills training for students for DNTU students

Survey Subjects	persons	%	Level of Evaluation									
			No important		Less important		Rather important		Important		Very important	
			Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%
Administrators	07	100	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	14.29	4	57.14	2	28.57
Lecturers	13	100	0	0.00	1	7.69	1	7.69	8	61.54	3	23.08
Students	81	100	3	3.70	12	14.81	17	20.99	39	48.15	10	12.35

The survey results above show that the assessment level focuses on the “Important” level, reaching 55.50% (with 51/101 respondents); the “Very important” level reaches 14.85% (with 15/101 respondents). However, there are still 2.97% of respondents who answered “Not important” (with 3/101 respondents); 12.87% of respondents who answered “Less important” (with 13/101 respondents) and up to 18.81% of respondents who answered “Quite important” (with 19/101 respondents), higher than the “Very important” assessment result. This survey result is equivalent to the survey results at some universities in Ho Chi Minh City at the “Important” level. With 98 respondents surveyed, 57.14% rated it as “Important” (with 56/98 respondents). However, at the “Very important” assessment level, the assessment reached 21.43% (with 21/98 respondents). Previous research results of Lai., et al. (2021); Nguyen (2021&2022), etc. have also pointed out the importance of soft skills and soft skills training for students. In the assessment of the Student Care and Support Department of Ho Chi Minh City University of Economics (2023), it was also affirmed: “The secret to “upgrading” yourself in 2023: When soft skills are indispensable”.

The above results show that soft skills training for DNTU students has been assessed as important and some people rate it as very important. According to SV1: “Soft skills are important for students because they help students be confident in communication, build many good relationships in life as well as in work, increase the ability to solve and handle many problems, and create many job opportunities”, this statement is agreed by SV4, SV5. According to SV2: “Soft skills help develop oneself, bring benefits to oneself and benefits to the community”. According to SV3: “I realize that having soft skills will help improve my personality, thinking, learning and communication with people a lot”. “According to GV1: “help students develop qualities such

as communication, time management, teamwork, and problem-solving. These skills support both the learning process and daily life”. Although there are many comments and clear assessments of the importance of soft skills, there are still some people who pay little attention and take this activity lightly. According to CBQL1: “Currently, there are still some students who are not interested in soft skills training because some of them do not immediately realize its necessity”, this view is agreed by both CBQL2 and CBQL3. This is considered a barrier in soft skills training for students, requiring universities to take measures to raise students’ awareness.

### 3.1.2. Assessing the level of interest in soft skills training for students

Correctly assessing the level of interest in soft skills training for students is necessary for Universities to have management measures to develop a soft skills training plan for students. The survey contents and results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Results of the assessment of the level of interest in soft skills training for DNTU students

Content	Yes		Less		No	
	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%
Do students know about soft skills?	67	66.34	25	24.75	9	8.91
Do students participate in soft skills classes organized by the University?	69	68.32	18	17.82	11	10.89
Do soft skills need to be practiced regularly?	72	71.29	22	21.78	10	9.90

Content	Yes		Less		No	
	Fre	%	Fre	%	Fre	%
Do students actively practice soft skills?	6	5.94	37	36.63	58	57.43
Does participating in movements of the Youth Union and Student Association help you improve your soft skills?	21	20.79	57	56.44	23	22.77
Does the teaching of lecturers develop soft skills for students?	71	70.30	25	24.75	5	4.95

The survey results in the table above show that the majority of students surveyed are aware of the role and importance of soft skills, and affirm that soft skills are essential not only for future work but also for studying, relationships with friends and social behavior. However, students are less interested in practicing soft skills or have incorrect perceptions about how to practice. In particular, the content “Do you actively practice soft skills?” has 57.43% of the answers “Not interested” (the highest % among the contents asked, meaning the lowest level of interest) (all 58 people who answered “Not interested” are students). In the surveyed contents, the highest level of interest is the content “Do soft skills need to be practiced regularly?” is rated the highest with 71.29% answering “must practice regularly”. The results of this study are similar to those of Lai, et al. (2021); Nguyen (2021 & 2022); Department of Student Care and Support, University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (2023); etc.

Commenting on this issue, according to GV2: “Soft skills cannot be formed quickly but need time and need to be practiced regularly and continuously”. According to GV3: “All educational activities will become meaningless if good habits are not formed for students. Therefore, this activity must be carried out regularly and continuously; at the same time, there must be appropriate training methods”. According to SV8: “Finding a soft skills class is relatively difficult because, besides the classes organized by the University, there are no skill centers around the University”, this comment is agreed by SV6 and SV7. With the above comments and assessments, the University needs to regularly organize soft skills classes for students; at the same time, have a plan to integrate them into regular teaching periods. Because that is the environment that helps students practice regularly.

### 3.2. Awareness of the position, role and necessary skills in soft skills training for Dong Nai Technology University students

Not everyone has a correct awareness of the position and role of soft skills training for students. To correctly assess the awareness of the position and role of soft skills training for Dong Nai Technology University students, this study surveyed 101 people. The content and results of the survey are shown in Table 4

**Table 4.** Awareness of the position and role of soft skills training for DNTU students

Content	Level of Evaluation					$\bar{X}$
	1	2	3	4	5	
Impress, like and trust people	3	12	15	55	16	3.68
Create connections, provide necessary skills to integrate into the surrounding environment, and help	2	9	14	59	17	3.79



Content	Level of Evaluation					$\bar{X}$
	1	2	3	4	5	
yourself a lot in life						
Help solve problems quickly	4	13	17	55	12	3.57
Increase your self value	4	14	17	53	13	3.56
Improve your quality of life	6	13	18	53	11	3.50
Help adapt to the university environment and find a job in the future	3	12	15	55	16	3.68
<b>Total average</b>	<b>3.67</b>	<b>12.17</b>	<b>16.00</b>	<b>55.17</b>	<b>14.17</b>	<b>3.64</b>

The survey results in Table 4 show that an average total of  $\bar{X} = 3.64$  in the range of  $3.41 \leq \bar{X} \leq 4.20$ , equivalent to the rating “Important”. Reviewing each survey content shows that there are 04 survey contents in the range of  $3.41 \leq \bar{X} \leq 4.20$  equivalent to the rating “Important”, and there is no content in the range of  $4.21 \leq \bar{X} \leq 5.0$  equivalent to the rating “Very Important”. However, there is still one content in the range  $2.61 \leq \bar{X} \leq 3.40$ , equivalent to the rating “Important”. The average score of each piece of content almost corresponds to the rating of each piece of content.

Thus, all surveyed contents, it show that soft skills have an important position and role for students. Regarding this issue, according to SV4: “Soft skills help students develop qualities such as communication, time management, teamwork, and problem-solving. These skills support both the learning process and daily life”. According to SV6: “Soft skills help students after graduation not to be confused and bewildered when communicating and working and it brings great value to each

of us, whether we are students or after graduation”. The survey results and these comments show the position and role of soft skills for students while they are still studying and even when working. Therefore, the enhancement of soft skills training for students needs to be paid more attention by TNDU leaders.

### 3.3. Assessment of soft skills training activities for Dong Nai Technology University students

#### 3.3.1. Evaluating the content and form of soft skills training for Dong Nai Technology University students

For soft skills training activities for students to be effective, determining the training forms is a basic and important factor. If the training forms are not correctly determined, the training activities may not achieve good results. To correctly evaluate the form of soft skills training activities for students, based on some previous studies, this study surveyed 101 people. The content and results of the survey are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Results of evaluating the form of soft skills training for DNTU students

Content	Level of Evaluation					$\bar{X}$
	1	2	3	4	5	
Through the subject “Skill Development” for students	4	12	15	54	16	3.65
Through the main subjects in class	2	9	14	59	17	3.79
Through the teaching activities of lecturers	5	13	18	55	10	3.51
Through the extracurricular activities of students	4	14	17	53	13	3.56
Through the movements of the Youth Union and Student Association in the University	5	13	18	54	11	3.52

Content	Level of Evaluation					$\bar{X}$
	1	2	3	4	5	
Through the internship and practice activities of students	5	12	17	52	15	3.59
<b>Total average</b>	<b>4.17</b>	<b>12.17</b>	<b>16.50</b>	<b>54.50</b>	<b>13.67</b>	<b>3.61</b>

The survey results in Table 5 show that an average total of  $\bar{X} = 3.61$  in the range  $3.41 \leq \bar{X} \leq 4.20$ , equivalent to the rating “Agree”. Reviewing each survey content shows that there are 04 survey contents in the range of  $3.41 \leq \bar{X} \leq 4.20$  equivalent to the rating “Agree”, and there is no content in the range of  $4.21 \leq \bar{X} \leq 5.0$  equivalent to the rating “Very Agree”. However, there is still one content in the range  $2.61 \leq \bar{X} \leq 3.40$ , equivalent to the rating “Partially agree”. The average score of each piece of content almost corresponds to the rating of each piece of content.

Among the evaluated contents, the training form “Through the subject “Developing skills” for students” with  $\bar{X} = 3.65$ ; the training form “Through internship and practice activities of students” was rated the lowest with  $\bar{X} = 3.59$ . Commenting on this assessment, according to CBQL4: “Organizing skill development classes for students is of interest to students and attracts a large number of students to participate, especially for students in the economic and social groups”. According to SV5: “Participating in skill development classes will help students meet good experts and teachers who inspire students a lot”. Thus, increasing soft skills development classes for students is necessary to improve soft skills for students.

### 3.3.2. Evaluation and selection of necessary skills in soft skills training for Dong Nai Technology University students

Many studies and training practices show that there are many necessary soft skills to train students. Based on previous studies and

the practical situation of DNTU, this study selected 11 skills for the survey. In addition, the survey form is open-ended by adding the item “Other” in the questionnaire for respondents to add (if necessary). The content and results of the survey are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6.** Necessary skills in soft skills training for DNTU students

Content	Level of Evaluation					$\bar{X}$
	1	2	3	4	5	
Learning and self-study skills	6	14	16	52	13	3.51
Presentation and public speaking skills	6	15	17	50	13	3.49
Communication and behavioral skills	5	15	20	50	11	3.47
Emotional management skills	5	16	19	51	10	3.45
Self-leadership and personal image-building skills	2	14	19	55	11	3.58
Creative and adventurous thinking skills	4	14	15	54	14	3.59
Planning and work organization skills	2	10	14	59	16	3.76
Teamwork skills	5	13	18	55	10	3.51
Negotiation skills	4	14	17	53	13	3.56
Communication and relationship building skills	5	13	18	54	11	3.52
Science and technology application skills	1	4	12	61	23	4.00
Other skills.....	7	17	21	50	6	3.31
<b>Total average</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>11.33</b>	<b>15.67</b>	<b>56.00</b>	<b>14.50</b>	<b>3.66</b>

The survey results in Table 6 show that an average total of  $\bar{X} = 3.66$  in the range of  $3.41 \leq \bar{X} \leq 4.20$ , equivalent to the rating “Necessary”. Reviewing each survey content shows that there are 04 survey contents in the

range of  $3.41 \leq \bar{X} \leq 4.20$  equivalent to the rating “Agree”, and there is no content in the range of  $4.21 \leq \bar{X} \leq 5.0$  equivalent to the rating “Very necessary”. However, there is still one content in the range of  $2.61 \leq \bar{X} \leq 3.40$ , equivalent to the rating “Less necessary”. The average score of each piece of content almost corresponds to the rating of each piece of content.

With this assessment, the skills (in Table 6) are all necessary to be included in the training program for students. Among the skills identified to be taught to DNTU students, “Science and technology application skills” is rated highest with  $\bar{X} = 4.00$ ; “Emotional management skills” is rated lowest with  $\bar{X} = 3.45$ . According to SV3: “DNTU is a University with strengths in training in science and technology, so in addition to professional knowledge, the University and teachers need to equip students with additional science and technology application skills so that students can immediately apply the knowledge they have learned”. According to GV4: “Emotional management skills are very necessary for students, this skill is relatively abstract and difficult to apply, so students are not interested in it”. With these results and assessments, the University must have the plan to open “Science and technology application skills” classes for students.

### **3.4. Some assessments of soft skills training activities for students of Dong Nai Technology University**

#### **3.4.1. Some achievements**

Since its establishment (2005) up to now, Dong Nai Technology University has always put the training quality as the top priority. The University has constantly innovated in content, methods, and forms of training; and applied information technology in the University’s activities, especially in teaching and learning activities. The quality of human resources trained by the university has been accepted and highly appreciated by society. In particular, soft skills training has contributed

significantly to the training quality of the University. This activity has been closely linked to the training process of specialized knowledge of the university.

Survey results show that students have realized the “importance” of soft skills ( $\bar{X} = 3.6$ ). That is soft skills have become a mandatory requirement for the training process of DNTU. According to the author’s research results, more than 87% of students have good and excellent academic performance, in their learning methods, they apply soft skills in subjects and when participating in movements. The skills trained by the university have been well applied by the students such as Public speaking skills, emotional management skills, Communication and relationship-building skills, and negotiation skills. The university teaching staff has recognized that when training according to the new program, students have to absorb a large amount of knowledge, and research documents both domestically and internationally, so building a reasonable learning method is extremely important. Therefore, under the guidance of the lecturers, DNTU students have formed a scientific study plan, the ability to quickly look up documents, search for information effectively, etc.

Studying under the pressure of exams along with university and class activities, the workload is not small. The problem is how to not overload students while still ensuring good results. With the soft skills equipped, the universities students know how to balance between studying and participating in university and class activities; ensuring work efficiency and health for themselves. Soft skills have taught students to divide time reasonably for each task, ensuring scientific and high efficiency. Thus, it can be seen that soft skills are a powerful tool to help students study better, helping students absorb and acquire knowledge more effectively. At the same time, it is also an important factor to help students more easily participate in activities

and movements of the class and the university. These achievements show that the university is on the right track in training necessary soft skills for students.

### **3.4.2. Limitations**

Although the university is fully aware of the role and importance of soft skills in the training process, it is a fact that the University does not pay much attention to soft skills training. The University does not have any centers specializing in soft skills training and granting certificates to students. All soft skills training activities are assigned to the Student Affairs Department, the Youth Union and some specialized departments of the University. On the other hand, the University is also confused in choosing which necessary soft skills to include in teaching. Currently, the University is only training 04 skills: Public speaking skills, Emotional management skills, Communication and relationship-building skills, and Negotiation skills. Each semester, 1 skill is learned from semester 1 to semester 4. This is also a major limitation in soft skills training for students compared to the 11 skills surveyed above

Some lecturers do not have a full and correct awareness of soft skills training for students. Survey and interview results show that lecturers only focus on teaching subject knowledge to students without the habit, or pay little attention to teaching soft skills to students. Therefore, when integrating skills, they are often confusing and time-consuming, especially for young lecturers who have just graduated and do not have much experience in teaching and integrating teaching skills. Meanwhile, imparting skills requires skill and creativity in creating appropriate teaching methods to avoid getting caught up in teaching soft skills and forgetting to impart professional knowledge.

In reality, students are currently aware that they are trying to study hard for their grades and are less concerned about other issues. Due to the lack of awareness and the lack of identification of the role and

importance of soft skills in studying and future careers, students are very passive in cultivating soft skills. When surveying students, with the question: Do you participate in soft skills classes? The results showed that: The number of students who have never participated was 45.68% (37/81 students asked). With the question: Are you proactive in finding soft skills classes outside of University? The results showed that: The number of students who answered “no” was 71.60% (58/81 students asked) and 8.64% of students answered that they did not know where to find or had difficulty finding soft skills classes (7/81 students asked). A relatively common answer was that students did not know how to choose the necessary soft skills to learn and cultivate, accounting for 65.43% (53/81 students asked).

### **3.4.3. Reasons**

Currently, soft skills have not been included in the main curriculum; the necessary soft skills for students have not been systematically taught. Most students have to study by themselves and seek out centers outside the University. Usually, students take a few short-term soft skills courses such as communication skills, presentation skills, teamwork skills, etc., and then quickly forget them because they do not apply them regularly and do not have an environment to practice.

The University has only introduced 04 skills into the curriculum, so it cannot meet the needs as well as provide comprehensive skills for students. In addition, the University currently does not have a comprehensive plan for soft skills training; the University does not have a detailed, specific plan for integrating soft skills into subjects. Integrated teaching is based on the needs of each lecturer, so the teaching is not systematic and the results are not high. To teach integrated teaching, lecturers must explore, and learn the topics, build integrated content, communication methods, appropriate teaching tools for each subject, and content of each lesson to educate skills for students. The time to teach integrated

skills into each subject is very short, only a few minutes in each lesson, so the effectiveness and students' ability to access soft skills is very low.

Thus, the limited awareness of students is also the fundamental reason why soft skills training activities for students have not achieved the desired results. The survey results showed that many students rated it as "not important".

### **3.5. Proposing solutions to improve the quality of soft skills training for students at Dong Nai Technology University**

#### ***3.5.1. Organizing to raise awareness of educational forces in the University about the position, role and importance of soft skills training for students.***

This activity helps the management team, lecturers, students and related social forces see the role, meaning, importance and necessity of soft skills training for students, thereby creating consensus, motivation, determination, self-awareness of responsibility and commitment to gradually build and develop quality in the University. When awareness is raised and habits and discipline are formed in the University, each individual and unit, depending on their functions and tasks, needs to be responsible for their work, ensuring that the work they perform is of high quality and meets the set goals. Every action starts from awareness, therefore, the organization to raise awareness of the educational forces in the University about the position, role and importance of soft skills training for students needs to be implemented immediately by the leaders of DNTU.

#### ***3.5.2. Selecting soft skills suitable for the training program and goals of Dong Nai Technology University***

The "Mission" of DNTU, is clearly defined: "Training quality human resources based on technology and experience; researching and applying science and transferring knowledge to meet social needs,

international integration and sustainable development. We are proud to train digital citizens - ready to conquer the future". With such a training mission, in addition to knowledge, hard skills (professional skills), soft skills chosen by the University also need to focus on the training direction of the University. However, the goal of an educational program must be to equip students with adequate knowledge, skills and attitudes. That is why hard skills are the main foundation of the curriculum, but soft skills also need to be well integrated for a successful career. The development of professional knowledge and soft skills is best cultivated when theoretical knowledge is skillfully applied in practice. This can be achieved through the programs, activities and even in the teaching practice of the University.

Today, many famous universities in the world and Vietnam are paying special attention to reorganizing the entire education system to raise it to modern standards. In the context of not being able to include soft skills in the curriculum framework of all majors, to achieve the goals and improve the skills of graduates, it is necessary to select soft skills that are suitable for the training program and goals of Dong Nai Technology University. Therefore, in addition to the 04 skills: Public speaking skills, Emotional management skills, Communication and relationship building skills, and Negotiation skills, based on the survey results, the University should at least add "Science and technology application skills" and focus on training this skill in depth. In addition, other skills also need to be deployed at appropriate levels.

#### ***3.5.3. Developing a plan to integrate soft skills education for students in the curriculum***

As analyzed above, in recent years, at Dong Nai Technology University, soft skills have received special attention. Many courses and discussion topics on soft skills are taking place. In this context, soft skills for university students are better known by another name,



life skills. According to CBQL2: “Limitations in soft skills development in universities are considered one of the most important barriers preventing graduates from smoothly transitioning to the workplace”. Therefore, soft skills education at DNTU is an urgent issue and is often carried out in the form of teaching as independent modules in the training program.

However, if soft skills are only taught to students through separate classes, the results may not be high. Soft skills need to be continuously trained during the learning process at University. Therefore, for soft skills to be continuously formed and supplemented, they need to be integrated into the main subjects. Based on previous studies, combined with training practices at Dong Nai Technology University, the author proposes that the integration of soft skills in teaching courses for students should be carried out in the following steps: (i) Clearly state the objectives of specialized lessons and directions for developing and practicing soft skills during the teaching process; (ii) Use active teaching methods to create a comfortable learning environment for students; (iii) Create environments and specific situations for students to apply, practice and easily acquire the knowledge they have learned.

In addition, it is necessary to determine the process of selecting subjects to integrate soft skills education for students. To achieve the results, the following steps must be followed: (i) Determine the main content of the lesson to be able to plan and organize soft skills integration activities focusing on appropriate key content; (ii) Identify the soft skills needed for students; (iii) Design activities suitable for soft skills; (iv) Organize testing activities and evaluate their effectiveness; (v) Organize activities that have been successfully tested for students; (vi) Check and evaluate the implementation process and effectiveness when implemented on students. After selecting subjects and activities to integrate soft skills education for

students, the important issue is that lecturers must choose methods and ways of organizing so that students are self-aware, active, and proactive in practicing soft skills for themselves.

#### ***5.3.4. Organizing soft skills training for students through extracurricular activities***

According to the assessment of GV3: “It is necessary to build a model of intensive classes, practice soft skills through extracurricular activities, actively participate in University activities, and at the same time, educational institutions must regularly connect with businesses or internship facilities to support students in learning practical soft skills for future work”. This assessment is agreed by many students and lecturers. To organize soft skills training for students through extracurricular activities, the University needs to assign the Student Affairs Department and the Youth Union to make a detailed plan for organizing extracurricular activities. In addition, assign the Departments and specialized Faculties to develop and implement a detailed plan for activities connecting with businesses during the internship, cultivating necessary soft skills.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The trend of globalization, international integration and the Industrial Revolution 4.0 has brought our country many benefits in all areas of social life. However, this huge change has caused significant impacts on the labor demand of the new economy. This leads to businesses and employers requiring workers to not only have professional qualifications but also soft skills to meet the changes in the new era. DNTU has recognized that importance and has made many changes in the program, content and training methods, in which, focusing on improving the quality of soft skills training for students is considered an important solution. However, research results show that new graduates still have many limitations in

soft skills to be able to work effectively and have a stable job, students usually lack proper awareness about the importance of soft skills; Soft skills training activities at the University remain incomplete and lack comprehensive coverage and clear focus. Comparison with the research results of previous authors shows the importance of soft skills and soft skills training for students. However, the research findings identify significant issues that need to be addressed promptly. The DNTU needs to implement many solutions to suit the current context. Integrating soft skills into formal teaching activities; organizing soft skills training for students through extracurricular activities; increasing the opening of soft skills training classes, focusing on a number of key skills is considered an optimal solution to support students. This study has pointed out the limitations, causes of limitations and recommended necessary solutions to improve the quality of soft skills education for DNTU students. However, due to many objective and subjective reasons, the content mentioned is not complete and comprehensive. Therefore, to properly assess the current situation and propose appropriate solutions, research will continue in the future.

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# NÂNG CAO CHẤT LƯỢNG ĐÀO TẠO KỸ NĂNG MỀM CHO SINH VIÊN TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC CÔNG NGHỆ ĐỒNG NAI

Nguyễn Thành Đăng Khoa<sup>1</sup>, Vũ Hồng Vận<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Trường Đại học Công nghệ Đồng Nai

<sup>2</sup>Trường Đại học Giao thông vận tải

\*Tác giả liên hệ: Vũ Hồng Vận, vanvh\_ph@utc.edu.vn

## THÔNG TIN CHUNG

Ngày nhận bài: 16/11/2024

Ngày nhận bài sửa: 11/3/2025

Ngày duyệt đăng: 21/3/2025

## TỪ KHOÁ

*Đào tạo kỹ năng mềm;*

*Kết quả bước đầu khả quan;*

*Nâng cao chất lượng;*

*Phương pháp hỗn hợp;*

*Sinh viên;*

*Trường đại học Công nghệ Đồng Nai.*

## TÓM TẮT

Đào tạo kỹ năng mềm cho sinh viên là một trong những nội dung quan trọng trong quá trình đào tạo toàn diện cho sinh viên, giới về kiến thức chuyên môn, có kỹ năng mềm tốt và có thái độ tích cực. Mục đích của nghiên cứu này là đánh giá thực trạng đào tạo kỹ năng mềm cho sinh viên, tìm ra những tồn tại, hạn chế, nguyên nhân của những tồn tại hạn chế; từ đó đề xuất các giải pháp nâng cao chất lượng đào tạo kỹ năng mềm cho sinh viên Trường Đại học Công nghệ Đồng Nai nhằm nâng cao chất lượng đào tạo toàn diện của nhà trường. Trong nghiên cứu này có 198 người là cán bộ quản lý, giảng viên, sinh viên tham gia khảo sát; trong đó có 101 người của Trường Đại học Công nghệ Đồng Nai và 97 người ở một số trường đại học tại Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh. Mẫu được chọn để phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc theo phương pháp thuận tiện, cỡ mẫu là 17 người ở Trường Đại học Công nghệ Đồng Nai, gồm: 04 cán bộ quản lý, 05 giảng viên và 08 sinh viên. Kết quả cho thấy, việc đào tạo kỹ năng mềm cho sinh viên nói chung và sinh viên Trường Đại học Công nghệ Đồng Nai nói riêng đã đạt được những kết quả tích cực, tuy nhiên vẫn còn một số tồn tại, hạn chế cần tiếp tục được khắc phục. Từ thực tiễn đó, nghiên cứu này đề xuất một số giải pháp nâng cao chất lượng đào tạo kỹ năng mềm cho sinh viên Trường Đại học Công nghệ Đồng Nai trong thời gian tới.