THE ELEMENTS OF SOFT SKILL AMONG STUDENTS AT PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

Muhammad Akmal Hakim Hazman[1], Latipah Nordin[2], Ahzilah Wahid[3]

[1,2,3]Student Development, Universiti Kuala Lumpur - Malaysian Institute of Industrial Technology, Masai, Johor
E-mail: [1]akmalhakim@unikl.edu.my, [2]latipah@unikl.edu.my, [3]ahzilah@unikl.edu.my

Abstract
University should play an important role in ensuring the undergraduate students to master the soft skills so that they are equipped with high quality skills, qualified and meet the criteria set by the job market. However, there are complaints from employers who say graduates are lack of soft skills. Therefore this study was conducted to examine the application of soft skills among private university students. The objective of this study is to identify the elements of soft skills acquired by the students. The focus for the soft skills of this study are communication skills, leadership skills and teamwork skills.

Index Terms--Soft Skills, University, Student

INTRODUCTION
The Ministry of Higher Education introduced the Soft Skills Module in 2007 with the aim to enhance soft skills among students in ensuring that they are able to compete in the job market after graduating. Soft Skills Module includes Communication Skills, Leadership Skills, Teamwork Skills, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Entrepreneurial Skills, Ethical and Moral Skills and Continuous Learning and Information Management Skills [1].

Soft skills is a set of skills that an individual needs to master irrespective of the job or job sector that the person is or will be pursuing [2]. Soft skills also refer to the individual's ability to function and contribute effectively to communication, problem solving, creative and critical thinking and to play an effective role as a team member. Soft skills also refer to the basic skills that an individual needs in getting, maintaining, performing well and effectively in their job [3].

Soft skills as the ability to perform a more practical and realistic work depending on an individual's capabilities and skills. Various initiatives and efforts have been planned and implemented by the Malaysian government to ensure that current university graduates have soft skills needed to compete in the increasingly challenging job market [4]. The Soft Skills Module was introduced by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia in 2007 aimed to produce graduates with high soft skills.

However, the problem of unemployment among graduates is often attributed to their failure to master soft skills well. Studentswho do not have good communication skills, are not able to work as a team, have low leadership ability and do not practice good ethics [5]. This is supported by [6] who stated that employers state that graduates lack the necessary skills such as communication skills and skills as a leader in the job market in this era of globalization. While Malaysian Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) produce thousands of graduates each year, majority of the graduates are not able to master the skills required in the labor market, especially soft skills [7].

The Ministry of Education (2017) said the unemployment rate of new graduates was 20.9% in 2017 with private university graduates have higher unemployment rate than public university graduates with the private university rate was 25.1% compared to public university rate was 21.6% [8].

Naturally after the Malaysian government introduced various initiatives such as the Soft Skills Module, graduates should fully master the skills required by the job market in this era of globalization. These situations reflect the development of quality human capital conducted at HEIs was not in line with current graduates. In addition, poor quality of education will certainly undermine the country's plan of producing skilled, competent and qualified graduates. As Soft Skills are an important element in ensuring that graduates are able to get a job, a study needs to be conducted to identify the elements of soft skills acquire among private university students.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE
1)   To identify the elements of communication skills that the students acquire in the university based on Formal Learning & Teaching Activities.
2)   To identify the elements of leadership skills that the students acquire in the university based on Formal Learning & Teaching Activities.
3)   To identify the elements of teamwork skills that the students acquire in the university based on Formal Learning& Teaching Activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Employers today are in dire need of students and graduates who master the soft skills, especially the skilled workforce that will drive national development [9]. The mastery of soft skills is critical as it enables students and graduates to play an important role in an organization [10]. Elements of soft skills need to be mastered and essential in the work and personal life [11]. The mastery of soft skills can be obtained through academic and co-curricular programs. Students need to have a balance in their involvement in academic and co-curricular programs [12].

Soft skills are a growing domain and have not yet reached concrete form. Soft skills involve a set of skills, applications and the ability to thrive in the corporate world [13]. Soft skills apply the ability of individuals to perform more practical and realistic tasks. Individuals who master soft skills can adapt to any change, and they should also be flexible, dynamic and skilled in performing assigned tasks [11].

Today's soft skills focus more on communication skills, problem solving skills, aspects of behavior and attitudes and decision making and organizational management [14]. The key

components of the soft skills development module are teamwork, leadership, communication skills, continuous learning and pure values [15].

Therefore, university needs to play their role to ensure the students master the soft skills needed to be obtained. Universities need to be ready to embrace change and improve the teaching and learning structure needed by society [16]. This change should take precedence as university needs to produce quality, qualified and competent students with a balanced life. Universities need to plan a comprehensive range of programs to ensure that the graduates are able to master the skills needed and balanced in all aspects [17].

Universities have played their part in organizing various quality programs aimed at enhancing student employability. The Soft Skills module is one of the initiatives undertaken by the university in enhancing student skills such as communication skills especially students' ability in English.

Although various programs and initiatives have been implemented by universities and the Ministry of Higher Education, employers still complain about the quality of students and graduates produced by university, especially in communication skills involving the students and graduate ability to communicate in English [18].

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
The Ministry of Higher Education has developed an approach to embed soft skills in students. The approach is a holistic approach that involves the role of the university in providing a medium for students to master soft skills.

The approach focuses on developing Soft Skills through participation in Formal Teaching and Learning Activities. Figure 1.0 illustrates the framework of soft skills development among HEIs to help student acquire essential soft skills.

Figure 1. Framework for Soft Skills Development among HEIs

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
The design for this study is a case study. Case study is used to study soft skills among students in private university. The researcher has identified the elements of soft skill acquired by students.

The soft skills studied are communication skills, leadership skills and teamwork skills. The study was conducted using a qualitative method in which the researcher used interview instrument to obtain the data.

The researcher used purposive sampling procedure as a method of sampling. Researchers selected third year students as study respondents because they have followed 80% of the teaching and learning processes in the classroom and participated in the university's co-curricular activities.

The researcher conducted the interview procedure until the researcher found a saturation point. The saturation point refers to the feedback received from the respondents almost the same as the other respondents [19].

Researcher's analysed interview data using five basic procedures for analyzing qualitative data [20]. The five basic procedures are as follows:
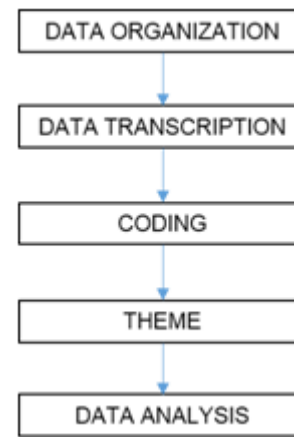

Figure 2. Procedure for Analyzing Qualitative Data
(Creswell, 2012)

The data organization stage refers to the process by which the researcher compiles the data in a file or computer. Data organization is very important because researchers will find a tremendous amount of data when conducting interviews. The next step is the data transcription stage which refers to the process of copying all the data obtained. This process involves copying the data from the interviews conducted by the researcher. The coding stage refers to the researcher giving the code to the key data obtained during the interview process. The theme stage refers to the researcher producing a summary of the various information received from the research data and grouping it under one theme.

FINDINGS
1. Communication Skills
The results of the interviews show that students acquired communication skills after participating in Formal Teaching and Learning Activities based on three dimensions which are knowledge, skills and intrapersonal. Figure 3 below shows the elements of communication skills acquired by the students.
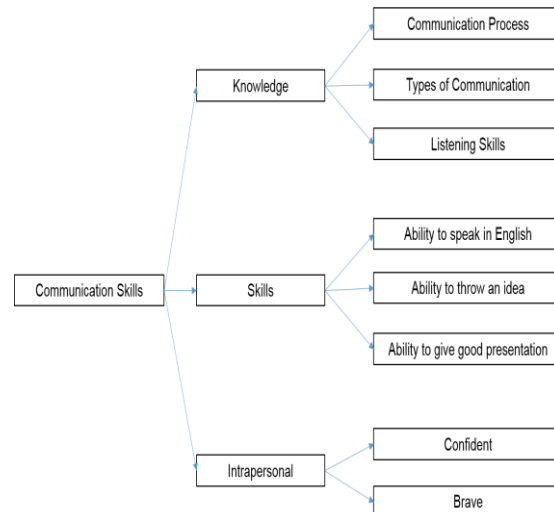

Figure 3. Elements of Communication Skills Acquired Based on Formal Teaching and Learning Activities

The students acquire communication skills through three dimensions which are knowledge, skills and interpersonal. In knowledge the students acquired the skills through subject in teaching and learning. The subject involve such as Interpersonal Skills, Organizational Behavior, Supervisory Skills, Community Service and Career Guidance. In these subjects the students

learned about the process involve in communication. Besides that they learn about types of communication and the importance of listening skills in communication.

The students acquired communication skills in skills dimension through classroom activities and assignment. The students acquired the ability to speak in English fluently. Majority of the subjects in the university are in English. Therefore it helps the students to enhance their ability to speak well in English.

Besides that, the student acquired the ability to throw an idea through classroom activities and assignment. They also will have ability to do a good presentation. For the intrapersonal dimension, the students gain confident to communicate with others.

2. Leadership Skills
The results of the interviews show that students acquired leadership skills after participating in Formal Teaching and Learning Activities based on three dimensions which are knowledge, skills and intrapersonal. Figure 4 below shows the elements of leadership skills acquired by the students.
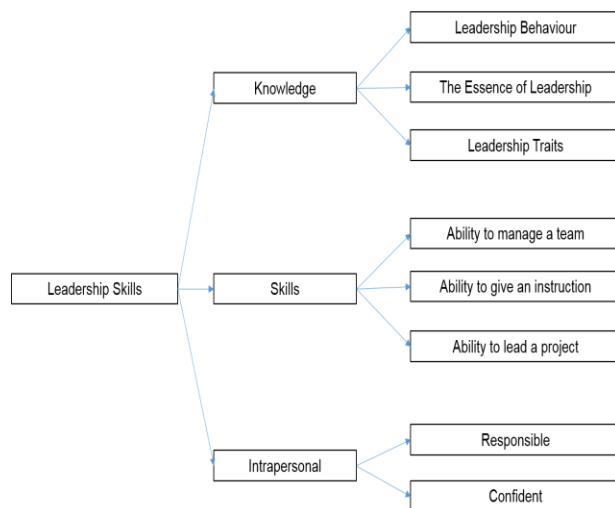
Figure 4. Elements of Leadership Skills Acquired Based on Formal Teaching and Learning Activities

The students acquired leadership skills through three dimensions which are knowledge, skills and interpersonal. In knowledge the students acquired the skills through subject in teaching and learning.

The subjects involved such as Interpersonal Skills, Organizational Behavior, Supervisory Skills, Community Service and Career Guidance. The student learned about Leadership Behavior. Besides that, they also learned about the Essence of Leadership and Leadership Traits.

In the skills dimension, the students have the opportunity to become a leader and manage a team. These skills are acquired through project and assignment. Besides that, the leader have an ability to give an instruction to the team member.

The student also have an ability to lead the project given by their respective lecturer or instructor. In intrapersonal dimension, the student will be more responsible to the team that they lead. They also gain confident to lead a team and give order to respective team members.

3. Teamwork Skills
The results of the interviews show that students acquired teamwork skills after participating in Formal Teaching and

Learning Activities based on three dimensions which are knowledge, skills and intrapersonal. Figure 5 below shows the elements of teamwork skills acquired by the students.
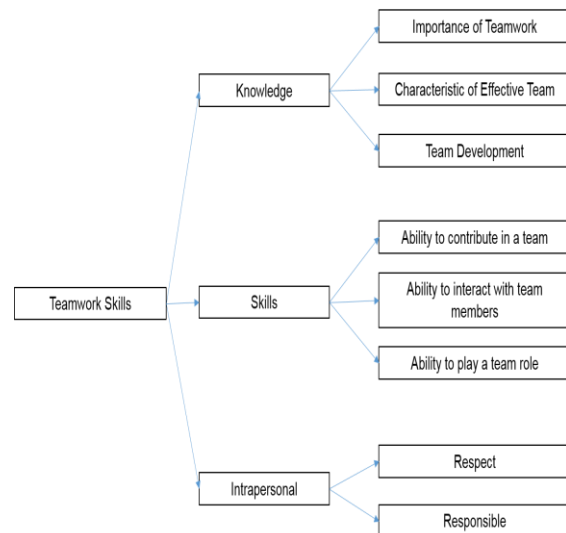
Figure 5. Elements of Teamwork Skills Acquired Based on Formal Teaching and Learning Activities

The students acquired teamwork skills through three dimensions which are knowledge, skills and interpersonal. In knowledge the students acquired the skills through subject in teaching and learning. The subjects involved such as Interpersonal Skills, Organizational Behavior, Supervisory Skills, Community Service and Career Guidance. In these subjects, they learned about the importance of teamwork. Besides that, they learned about the characteristic of an effective team. They also learned about how to develop a good team.

In skills dimension, the students will have an ability to contribute in a team as leader or a team member. It is very essential in achieving the target that had been set up. The students also have ability to interact with other team members. They will discuss and plan accordingly to achieve the target. The students also know when to play a team role which is either as a leader or as a team member. In intrapersonal dimension, the students will gain respect for respective team members. Besides that, the students learned how to respect others. The students also learned that they need to be responsible with every decision making by the team and bare all consequence that will happen from that decision making.

DISCUSSION
The study has revealed the element of soft skills acquired among students at the HEIs. The results of the study showed that the students acquired soft skills based on three dimensions which are knowledge, skills and intrapersonal after participating in Formal Teaching and Learning Activities. Quality education will ensure the university produced graduates that will be able to compete in the job market and qualify based on the job market criteria.

1. Communication Skills
The student acquired communication skills through the subjects taken by them. Students at university have the obligation to take various courses offered to meet the requirements of graduation. The subjects are offered to students because they are highly relevant and meet the criteria set in the job market based on their basic knowledge and skills. Academic experience is critical to ensure student excellence and to provide better job opportunities

The student also acquired skills dimension through the project and assessment given to them by the respective lecturer or instructor. Students also agreed that they received elements of communication skills through activities conducted in the classroom. Previous study stated that communication skills need to be acquired through the actual communication process. Students acquired elements of communication skills through their ability to speak English. The use of English in teaching and learning helps to improve students' ability to speak in English. The students also have ability to deliver ideas and improve communication. Communication involves the transmission of ideas and emotions to others.

In the intrapersonal dimension, the students acquired elements of communication skills as they become more confident and courageous after they followed Formal Teaching and Learning Activities.

2. Leadership Skills
The students acquired Leadership Skills through three dimensions which are knowledge, skills and intrapersonal. Student development is a necessary skill in producing student leader. Leadership skills that are ability to lead a team to achieve a set goal.

In skills dimension, student acquired leadership skills through managing members, monitoring members and instructing members. These elements refer to a leader's role in managing an organization. The role of a leader is to create a good environment for an organization to improve the performance of its members.
In the dimension of intrapersonal, students acquired elements when they become more responsible and confident. A leader must show that he is a responsible and confident leader. Universities need to increase their ability to apply leadership skills to their students so that they can develop the responsibility and confidence of being a leader.

3. Teamwork Skills
The students acquired Teamwork Skills through three dimensions which are knowledge, skills and intrapersonal. In knowledge dimension, student acquired teamwork skills through the courses offered to them.

In skills dimension, students acquired teamwork skills which involved person's ability to work with others to achieve their goals. Members of the group regularly interact and discuss within the group, helping each other out and receiving instruction from thegroup leader. This behavior will contribute to the increase of team spirit in the team.

In the intrapersonal dimension, students also acquired elements when they become more responsible and respectful. Universities are responsible for ensuring that students get a new behavior. Universities need to provide students with the opportunity to develop and acquire pure attitudes and values such as accountability and respect.

CONCLUSION
Overall, this study proved that students acquired elements of soft skills through Formal Teaching and Learning Activities. They acquired the skills through three elements which are knowledge, skills and intrapersonal. This study is important in helping universities produce quality, qualified and competent graduates who can compete in the job market and help improve the country's economy and development.

REFERENCES
1. Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi (2007). Pelan Tindakan Pengajian Tinggi Negara 2007-2010. Putrajaya: Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi.
2. Noor Azean Atan and Vee Lynn Khoo(2010). "*Penerapan Kemahiran Insaniah Di Kalangan Guru Pelatih Yang Mengambil Kursus Sains Komputer Di Fakulti Pendidikan Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.*" Fakulti Pendidikan Universiti Teknologi Malaysia .pp. 1-7. (Unpublished)
3. Ahmad bin Esa, Kamarudin bin Khalid, Sarebah binti Warman, Aida Ilyani Binti Ali (2014). Penerapan dan Kesedaran Kemahiran Kepimpinan Menerusi, Kokurikulum Silat dalam Kalangan Pelajar UTHM *Prosiding Persidangan Kebangsaan Pembangunan Holistik Pelajar (NAHSDEC) 2014*
4. Nur Dalila Abdul Aziza & Ruslin Amir, (2017). "Kemahiran Insaniah Pelajar Sekolah Menengah Teknik dan Kolej Vokasional". Konvensyen Kaunseling Kebangsaan 2017.
5. Zaini Ujang (2009). Mengangkasa Pengajian Tinggi. Skudai: Penerbit UTM Press.
6. Koo Yew Lie., Vincent Pang. dan Fadhil Mansur. 2009. Employer perception on graduate literacy's in higher education in relation to the workplace. fhttp://www.espworld.info/Articles_20/DOC/Koo_vp_empl oyer_Journal18Oct09.pdf. [Diakses pada 28 Februari 2016].
7. Noraini Binti Kaprawi (2012) Transformation Of Tvet Systems Towards Enhanced Youth Employbility : Malaysia Country Report, UNESCO
8. Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia (2017) Laporan Kajian Pengesanan Graduan. Putrajaya. Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia
9. Mansor, Z. (2008). Pelaksanaan dan Penilaian Kemahiran Insaniah Dalam Mata Pelajaran Kokurikulum di UTHM. Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia: Tesis Sarjana.
10. Ai-Hwa, Q. (2005). Learning For The Workplace: A Case Study in Graduate Employees Generic Competencies. Journal of Workplace Learning.
11. Azman & Azreen Harina, (2008) "Penerapan Kemahiran Generik Dalam Pengajaran Program Pendidikan Kejuruteraan Di Politeknik Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia (KPTM)." Tesis Sarjana, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia.
12. Othman, H. (2008) Model Penerapan Kemahiranemployability Ipta Berasaskan Pbl, UTM
13. A.Jalil, Noor Azyani and Ahmad Esa, (2012). " *Kemahiran Menyelesaikan Masalah Menerusi Aktiviti Kokurikulum (Khidmat Masyarakat) Dalam Kalangan Pelajar.* "In: Prosiding Seminar Pendidikan Ijazah dalam PTV Kali Ke 2 Tahun 2012, 13 Jun 2012, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia.
14. Mohanaraju Annamalai Ahmad Tajuddin Othman & Abdul Ghani Kanesan Abdullah, (2014). "Pengaruh Sokongan Keluarga Dalam Penglibatan Kokurikulum Sekolah Terhadap Pencapaian Kemahiran Insaniah Murid."*Prosiding Persidangan Kebangsaan Pembangunan Holistik Pelajar (NAHSDEC) 2014*
15. Nurull Salmi Md. Dazali & Isha Awang, (2017). "Tahap Kemahiran Generik Dalam Kalangan Pelajar Sarjana Muda Pendidikan Di IPTA Malaysia: Satu Kajian Kes." Journal of Holistic Student Development Vol. 4, No. 1 (2017).
16. Silins, Halia dan Mulford, Bill. (2002). Schools As Learning Organisations: The Case For Systems, Teacher and Student Learning. Journal of Educational Adminstrations. Vol 40. No 5, 2002. Pp.425-226.
17. Rafidah Aga Mohd Jaladin, & Noh Amit (2006). Halatuju Perkembangan Pembangunan Pelajar di Kolej Kediaman: Satu Perkongsian [Future directions of students development at the residential colleges: a shared experience]. Paper presented at Persidangan Pembangunan Pelajar Peringkat Kebangsaan (NASDEC) 2006, Hotel Grand Seasons, Kuala Lumpur, 8-9 Ogos 2006]. (Non-ISI/Non-SCOPUS)
18. Muhammad Hazrul Ismail (2012). Kajian Mengenai Kebolehpasaran Siswazah Di Malaysia: Tinjauan Dari Perspektif Majikan. Prosiding PERKEM VII, Jilid 2 (2012) 906 -913.

19. Dayang Tiawa Awang Hamid dan Abdul Hafidz Omar (2009). Analisis Data Kualitatif. Skudai: NasMAX.
20. Creswell, John W. (2012) Education Research: Planning: Conducting, And Evaluating Quantitative And Qualitative Research. Fourth Edition. Boston : Pearson.

AUTHORS

Muhammad Akmal Hakim Hazman a lecturer at Student Development Section, Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Institute of Industrial Technology, Malaysia. Muhammad Akmal received his first degree from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and followed by his Master in Education from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM).akmalhakim@unikl.edu.my

Dr Latifah Nordin and English Lecturer at Student Development Section, Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Institute of Industrial Technology, Malaysia. Dr Latifah obtained her first degree in Translation and Interpretation from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), received her Master in Education (TESL) and PhD from Universiti Technologi Malaysia.latipah@unikl.edu.my

Dr Ahzilah Wahid a lecturer at Student Development Section, Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Institute of Industrial Technology, Malaysia. Dr Ahzilah earned her first degree in Marketing Management from Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) holds an M.S.c Management and a PhD in Management from Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM). ahzilah@unikl.edu.my

Correspondence Author – Muhammad Akmal Hakim Hazman, akmalhakim@unikl.edu.my, 0177851689