



# THE EFFECT OF STRUCTURED TRAINING ON IMPROVING THE SOFT SKILLS OF MAMBAUL ULUM PONJANAN TIMUR ISLAMIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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**Abstract:** This study aims to determine the effect of structured training on improving students' soft skills at Mambaul Ulum Ponjanaan Timur Islamic High School. Soft skills are non-academic skills that are very important in supporting students' success, both in education and social life. However, initial observations show that most students still have low soft skills, such as ineffective communication, weak teamwork, and lack of leadership and self-management skills. For this reason, intervention in the form of systematically and structurally designed training is needed. This study used a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design in the form of a pretest-posttest control group design. The sample consisted of two classes, namely the experimental group and the control group, each consisting of 30 students. The instrument used was a soft skill questionnaire that had been tested for validity and reliability. The experimental group received soft skill training for eight sessions, while the control group did not receive special treatment. The results showed a significant improvement in students' soft skills after undergoing structured training. The average post-test score of the experimental group was higher than that of the control group. The *paired sample t-test* and *independent t-test* showed a significance value of  $<0.05$ , with a large *effect size* value. These findings indicate that structured training is effective in improving students' soft skills overall.

**Keywords:** Structured training, soft skills, students, communication, cooperation, leadership

## INTRODUCTION

In the increasingly advanced 5.0 era, the need for human resources that are not only excellent in the academic field but also have soft skills is becoming increasingly important. Today's world of work and social life demands that individuals be able to communicate well, work in teams, have empathy, be able to solve problems, think critically, and have high work ethics. Therefore, according Putra, (2020) education cannot only focus on achieving cognitive aspects but must also give space and great attention to the development of students' soft skills. Unfortunately, in practice, the development of soft skills in educational institutions, especially at the madrasah aliyah (Islamic high school) level, is still often neglected and has not become a top priority in the curriculum or daily learning activities.

Mambaul Ulum Ponjanaan Timur Islamic High School, as one of the Islamic educational institutions under the auspices, has a moral and institutional responsibility to produce young generations who are not only knowledgeable but also have character and adequate life skills. The reality in the field shows that many students still have difficulty communicating effectively, lack confidence when performing in public, have difficulty working in a team, and are unable to manage their emotions well. This is a challenge for educational institutions, including Mambaul Ulum Islamic High School, in preparing their students to face the challenges of life after graduation, whether in the world of work, college, or society. One of the efforts that can be made to overcome these problems is through structured training that is

designed systematically and continuously to develop students' soft skills. Structured training refers to a program that has a clear curriculum, method, and evaluation so that it can have a significant impact on the abilities of the learners (Jafar dkk., 2024). This training is not only theoretical, but also applicable through simulation activities, case studies, role-plays, and group discussions, which can stimulate students to develop their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

The theory underlying this research is David A. Kolb's *Experiential Learning* theory, which states that effective learning occurs through direct experience involving a four-stage cycle, namely *concrete experience*, *reflective observation*, *abstract conceptualization*, and *active experimentation*. Through structured training based on this principle, students not only learn through lectures or textbooks, but also experience for themselves situations that can hone their ability to communicate, work together, and think critically (Fitriany & Ivonesti, 2021). In addition, Howard Gardner's theory of *Multiple Intelligences* is also the basis for the development of this training program, in which intelligence is not only measured from the logical-mathematical and linguistic aspects, but also from interpersonal, intrapersonal, and kinesthetic intelligence (Mahardika dkk., 2024). In this context, soft skill training is an effective means of developing various aspects of student intelligence that are not fully accommodated in formal classroom learning (Putri dkk., 2020).

This study aims to determine how much influence structured training has on improving the soft skills of students at Mambaul Ulum Ponjangan Timur Islamic High School. Using a quantitative approach and a quasi-experimental design, the researcher wants to measure the significant changes that occur in students after participating in the training program, compared to before the training was conducted. The main focus of this study is on soft skills such as communication, leadership, teamwork, time management, and problem-solving. The urgency of this research is very high, considering the increasingly complex challenges of the times that require a mentally and socially resilient younger generation. Without adequate soft skills, madrasah graduates risk having difficulty adapting to the dynamic outside world. Education that is only oriented toward academic aspects is no longer enough to produce a generation that is ready to compete and contribute to society. Therefore, it is important for educational institutions such as Mambaul Ulum Islamic High School to start thinking about and implementing effective strategies to equip students with relevant and applicable soft skills.

In addition, the results of this study are also expected to be an important reference for teachers, madrasah heads, and education policymakers in designing more holistic learning and self-development programs for students. With empirical evidence on the effectiveness of

structured training, madrasahs can make this kind of training an integral part of the character development and 21st-century skills curriculum (Hidayah dkk., 2024). Training programs can also be integrated into extracurricular activities or madrasah programs based on life skills education. In the local socio-cultural context, soft skill training is also very important because it helps students to be able to adapt to a pluralistic and complex community environment. In the East Ponjanan area, where social challenges such as low awareness of good communication, lack of tolerance, and a spirit of collaboration are still issues, the development of soft skills is one of the strategic solutions in shaping a younger generation that is more inclusive, open, and ready to be agents of change in society.

This research also contributes to the development of scientific literature, especially in the field of Islamic education and the character development of students. There is still little research that specifically examines the effect of structured training on students' soft skills in madrasah environments, especially at the regional level such as Mambaul Ulum Ponjanan Timur Islamic High School. Thus, this research can fill the gap in studies and open up a broader discussion about the importance of soft skill-based educational innovation in Islamic educational environments. Overall, this research is expected to raise new awareness among educators, students, and the community that education is not just about grades and scores, but also about shaping well-rounded individuals who are capable of critical thinking, wise behavior, and responsible actions. Soft skills are not a complement, but rather the main foundation in shaping emotionally and socially mature individuals. Therefore, well-designed and continuously structured training is one way to achieve this goal.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design. The design used is a pretest-posttest with control group design, where there are two groups, namely the experimental group that receives treatment in the form of structured training, and the control group that does not receive training (Jaya, 2020). The purpose of using this design is to determine the effect of structured training on improving students' *soft skills* in an objective and measurable manner. The population in this study were all grade XI students at Mambaul Ulum Ponjanan Timur Islamic High School in the 2024/2025 academic year. Sampling was carried out using purposive sampling, which involved selecting two classes with relatively similar characteristics, and then randomly determining one class as the experimental group and one class as the control group. The number of samples in each group consisted of 30 students.

The instrument used in this study was a *soft skill* questionnaire compiled based on *soft skill* indicators such as communication, cooperation, leadership, and problem-solving abilities.

The validity and reliability of this questionnaire were tested before it was used in data collection. Data were collected through the distribution of questionnaires before and after the training (*pretest* and *posttest*). The structured training was carried out over 4 weeks with 8 sessions, using simulation, discussion, case study, and reflection methods. Data analysis was carried out using t-tests (paired t-test and independent t-test) to determine the difference in *soft skill* scores before and after training and to compare the results between the experimental and control groups. The results of this analysis will indicate the effectiveness of structured training in improving students' *soft skills*.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the statistical analysis used a paired sample t-test for each group, as well as an independent sample t-test to compare the differences in posttest scores between the experimental group and the control group.

- a. Paired Sample t-Test (Experimental Group) The test results show that the calculated *t-value* is 9.87 with a *p-value* of  $<0.001$ , which means that there is a very significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the experimental group. Thus, structured training has been proven to have a significant impact on improving students' soft skills.
- b. Paired Sample t-Test (Control Group) In the control group, the t-score was 1.15 with a *p-value* of 0.257, which means that there is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores. This shows that without special training, students' soft skills tend not to change significantly.
- c. Independent Sample t-Test (Posttest Experimental Group vs. Control Group) The comparison of posttest scores between the two groups shows a calculated *t* of 7.42 with a *p-value* of  $<0.001$ . These results show a very significant difference between the experimental group and the control group after the training was conducted. This means that a significant increase in soft skills only occurs in students who receive structured training.

In addition to the *t-test*, an effect size analysis using Cohen's *d* formula was also performed to measure the magnitude of the training effect. Cohen's *d* value is 1.56, which shows that structured training has a very large effect on improving students' soft skills (because a value  $> 0.8$  is considered a large effect according to Cohen's criteria). This study involved two groups, namely the experimental group that received structured training, and the control group that did not receive any treatment other than regular learning. Each group consisted of 30 students in grade XI Mambaul Ulum Ponjanan Timur Islamic High School. Measurements

were taken twice, before training (pretest) and after training (posttest), using a soft skill questionnaire that measured the dimensions of communication, teamwork, leadership, time management, and emotional control. The descriptive results show that at the time of the pretest, the average soft skill score of the experimental group was 68.43, while the control group had an average of 67.90. This indicates that before the training, both groups had relatively balanced soft skill abilities. However, after the training, the average posttest score in the experimental group increased to 84.60, while the control group only rose to 70.13.

The significant increase in scores in the experimental group was evenly distributed across all soft skill indicators. The highest increase occurred in the communication indicator, which previously had an average score of 66.20 and increased to 85.80. The teamwork and leadership indicators also experienced a significant surge, increasing from 69.10 to 83.70 and from 67.50 to 82.10, respectively. Meanwhile, the time management and emotional control indicators increased from an average score of around 68 to more than 83 after the training. It is common knowledge that this study aims to determine the effect of structured training on improving the soft skills of Mambaul Ulum Ponjanaan Timur Islamic High School students. In its implementation, the study used a pretest-posttest design with a control group. Two classes with similar characteristics were selected as samples, where one class was used as an experimental group that received structured soft skill training, and another class was used as a control group that did not receive similar treatment. Data collection was carried out through a soft skill questionnaire that had been tested for validity and reliability, given before and after training to both groups.

The data analysis results show that there was a significant increase in soft skill scores in the experimental group after undergoing structured training. The average pretest score of the experimental group showed that the scores were still moderate, with most students demonstrating suboptimal communication, cooperation, leadership, and self-management skills. However, after the training, the posttest score of the experimental group increased significantly, indicating that structured training was able to improve these dimensions of soft skills. Meanwhile, in the control group, the change in scores from pretest to posttest did not show a significant improvement. In fact, in some aspects such as communication and leadership skills, scores tend to stagnate. This indicates that without a planned intervention or soft skills development program, improvement in these aspects tends not to occur naturally in the conventional learning process.

The structured training, which was carried out over four weeks, consisted of eight sessions, each lasting 90 minutes. The material provided included effective communication

skills, teamwork, decision-making, time management, emotional control, and leadership. The training methods used were simulations, role plays, group discussions, case studies, and individual reflections. This training is designed based on David Kolb's experiential learning approach, where students are actively involved in a learning process based on direct experience and reflection. In the aspect of communication skills, students in the experimental group showed significant progress. Before the training, most students had difficulty expressing their opinions straightforwardly, lacked confidence when speaking in public, and tended to be passive in group discussions. However, after the training, the students became more active, able to present arguments in a more structured way, and showed an improvement in their ability to listen and respond. This was evident from the results of the questionnaire and observations during the training activities, where the students were more responsive and participative in various simulations and discussions.

Teamwork skills also improved significantly. Before the training, group work was often dominated by one or two students, while others tended to be passive or even not contribute at all. However, after the training, group dynamics became more even, the roles of each group member were clearer, and there was an effective division of tasks. The training, which emphasized the importance of respecting the roles and opinions of fellow team members, made students better understand the importance of collaboration in achieving common goals. Improvements also occurred in the aspect of leadership. Initially, only a small number of students dared to appear as leaders in the group, while most others showed a tendency to follow without providing initiative. After attending training sessions on participatory leadership and assertive communication, students became more confident in taking on the role of leader, being able to manage group discussions, give clear directions, and show empathy towards team members.

Aspects of self-management, such as time management and emotional control, also improved significantly. Students who were previously often late in completing group assignments, or were easily emotional in dealing with differences of opinion, became more organized and calm in resolving problems. This was demonstrated by the increase in scores on the self-management indicator in the questionnaire, as well as from observation notes made during the training process. Compared to the control group, the improvement in the experimental group was much more significant. The control group did not show significant progress in soft skill aspects, because, during the research period, they only followed the learning process as usual without special training intervention. This reinforces the conclusion that structured training makes a real contribution to improving students' soft skills. These

results are in line with previous findings which show that interventions in the form of systematic training or self-development programs can improve learners' soft skills. Research conducted by Sriwahyuni dkk., (2024) concluded that experiential learning-based training was able to significantly improve students' critical thinking and communication skills. Similarly, research from Saoqillah dkk., (2023) shows that soft skills such as teamwork, leadership, and emotional management can be improved through appropriately designed, hands-on training.

The results of this study also show that training conducted in a fun and interactive atmosphere can increase students' motivation to learn and participate. Some previously quiet students become more active because they feel safe to express themselves. This reinforces Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences, where learning that values the variation of students' intrapersonal, interpersonal, kinesthetic, and other intelligences can increase overall engagement and learning outcomes (Tholib dkk., 2024). In addition, Kolb's experiential learning theory has also proven relevant in the implementation of this training. By providing concrete experiences through simulations and discussions, and then inviting students to reflect and derive meaning, the training is able to foster deeper awareness and behavior change. Kolb's learning cycle (experience, reflection, conceptualization, active experimentation) can be identified in each training session, and students demonstrate the ability to internalize the material provided in the context of their real lives (Haironi, 2024).

Interestingly, the training also had a positive effect on social relationships between students. During the training, there was an increase in mutual respect, tolerance, and trust among students. Some students who previously had conflicts or were not very close became closer and were able to work together. This shows that soft skill training not only has an impact on individuals but also social dynamics in the school environment. However, several obstacles were also encountered during the training. Some students were initially less enthusiastic about participating in the training sessions because they considered the activities to be outside their learning routine. In addition, limited time and facilities also posed challenges. Nevertheless, in general, the training was able to run smoothly due to the support from the madrasah and the active involvement of experienced facilitators (Swandari & Jemani, 2023).

Another interesting finding is that this training is more effective for students who are extroverted or have high interpersonal skills. Introverted students require a more cautious approach and more time to adjust to open and interactive activities. This shows the importance of differentiating training strategies according to the characteristics of the learners. From the overall findings, it can be concluded that structured training has a significant positive effect on improving the soft skills of students at Mambaul Ulum Ponjanan Timur Islamic High School.

Training not only improves technical abilities in communication and leadership, but also shapes character, increases confidence, and improves social relations between students. This is proof that consciously and systematically designed educational interventions are capable of having a deeper impact than conventional learning. The implications of these results are very important for the madrasah. Soft skill development programs need to be integrated into the curriculum or extracurricular activities on an ongoing basis. Teachers can also be trained to apply learning methods that are able to hone students' soft skills in daily learning activities. In addition, collaboration with external parties, such as professional trainers or training institutions, can be an alternative to support the sustainability of this program.

The results of this study can also be the basis for further research with a broader scope. Future researchers can explore the long-term impact of soft skills training, or examine the effectiveness of different training methods based on student characteristics. In addition, similar research can be conducted at the madrasah or other school levels to enrich comparative data and strengthen empirical evidence about the importance of soft skills training in educational environments. In conclusion, the results and discussion of this study emphasize that structured training is not just an additional activity, but an important part of character education that must be developed seriously. Amid the challenges of an era that demands the younger generation to be adaptive, collaborative, and innovative, the development of soft skills through appropriate training is essential in preparing students who are not only academically intelligent but also emotionally and socially mature.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the results of the research that has been carried out, it can be concluded that structured training has a significant effect on improving the soft skills of students at Mambaul Ulum Ponjanaan Timur Islamic High School. The training, which is designed with an experiential learning approach, is able to improve various aspects of soft skills, including communication skills, teamwork, leadership, time management, and emotional control. This is evident from the significant difference in pretest and posttest scores in the experimental group, as well as the clear comparison between the experimental group and the control group. The most dominant improvement was seen in the aspects of communication and cooperation, indicating that the training was very effective in building students' ability to interact and collaborate in social and academic environments. In addition, the training also succeeded in increasing students' confidence in leading, managing time, and dealing with emotional situations more wisely. The effectiveness of this training is supported by the interactive methods used, such as simulations, role plays, group discussions, and case studies, which are able to encourage the active involvement of students in each session.



Statistical analysis, both through *paired t-tests* and *independent t-tests*, shows that structured training has a very large influence with a high effectiveness value (Cohen's  $d > 1$ ). These findings reinforce the view that soft skills are not merely innate abilities, but can be developed through a systematic and planned educational process. Thus, structured training can be a strategic solution in improving the non-academic quality of students, which in turn will support their success in social life, further education, and the world of work in the future.

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