

Fundamental solutions to enhance the efficiency of managing soft skills education for current pedagogical students

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Abstract: Faced with the demands and challenges of integration, the workforce in general and pedagogical students in particular need to be trained in skills, especially soft skills, to effectively manage their work, maintain sustainable employment, adapt to modern life, and thrive in an increasingly dynamic, pressured, and competitive environment. A current issue is how to improve the quality of soft skills education management for pedagogical students. Based on a survey of the management of soft skills education for pedagogical students at several universities, the author proposes several fundamental solutions to enhance the efficiency of managing soft skills education for pedagogical students in Vietnam today.

Keywords: Soft skills education; efficiency improvement; pedagogical students; universities; Vietnam.

1. Introduction

As future educators, pedagogical students are the young intellectual force and the future pillar of the national education system. Their role as 'teachers,' 'word sowers,' and 'knowledge transmitters' will influence many other professions through educational activities. In addition to the common challenges and demands of the integration era, pedagogical students face a significant challenge to participate in the comprehensive reform of the country's education system. To effectively carry out this reform, they need the 'inner strength' that can be achieved through the development of numerous skills, especially soft skills, to fulfill their

educational tasks. This includes not only imparting knowledge but also developing the personalities of generations of students.

Currently, pedagogical universities, like many others, tend to prioritize teaching specialized subjects over soft skills. For instance, the Hanoi National University of Education and Ho Chi Minh City University of Education each allocate 21 credits to courses that directly or indirectly equip students with soft skills, out of a total of 136 and 135 specialized training credits respectively. This imbalance in the curriculum indicates a need for a shift in focus toward soft skills education.

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At Thai Nguyen University of Education, this number is 17 credits out of a total of 131 credits, excluding the Physical Education and National Defense Education modules (Thai Nguyen University of Education, 2024). Meanwhile, the training program at Vinh University rarely addresses soft skills education. For instance, the chemistry teacher training program does not even include courses on teaching methods or communication skills within its 132 total credits (Vinh University, 2024). This leads to a lack of pedagogical and soft skills among students in general and pedagogical students in particular, which is a significant limitation in meeting the professional standards of educators, significantly impacting the quality of the workforce in general and the quality of education in particular (Linh & Trang, 2022). The main reason for this is that the current teacher training programs at pedagogical universities still primarily focus on equipping students with theoretical knowledge while undervaluing the importance of professional skills education. Additionally, the methods and forms of soft skills education for pedagogical students are still limited; those involved in soft skills education do not yet fully and correctly recognize the importance of equipping students with these skills; the inspection and evaluation of activities and outcomes of soft skills education have not been given adequate attention and remain largely superficial.

2. Research methodology

The author employs various methods, including analysis, synthesis, generalization, and systematization of documents related to soft skills education activities and managing these activities for pedagogical students. Additionally, the author uses data processing methods after collecting survey questionnaires from managers, lecturers, and students. Corresponding to different assessment levels, the author evaluates the current state of soft skills teaching management and the

conditions ensuring the quality of management of soft skills education for pedagogical students.

3. Research findings

Based on a survey of 200 managers, 320 lecturers, and 1.000 pedagogical students at several universities (Hanoi National University of Education, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education, Thai Nguyen University of Education, and Vinh University) regarding the current state of soft skills education management for pedagogical students, the findings are as follows:

Regarding the criteria for identifying and implementing soft skills education objectives for students, Hanoi National University of Education and Ho Chi Minh City University of Education reported a total rate of "good" and "very good" at 100%. In contrast, this rate was only over 81.5% at Thai Nguyen University of Education and Vinh University.

The criteria of soft skills education management show positive results. Notably, all entities within the university, including socio-political organizations such as the Student Association, the Youth Union, etc., are actively involved and contribute to the education of soft skills for students. This collective effort significantly improves the effectiveness of managing soft skills education activities for students.

Regarding the capacity of those involved in soft skills education for students, the survey results reveal differences in the percentage of ratings between "Poor + Average" and "Fair + Good + Very Good" across various universities. Specifically, 100% of managers and lecturers at Hanoi National University of Education and Ho Chi Minh City University of Education rated their performance as "Fair", "Good," or "Very Good," with average scores of 3.8 and 3.9, respectively. In contrast, at Thai Nguyen University of Education, 15% and 14% of managers and lecturers rated their performance as "Poor" and "Average," with

average scores of 3.2 and 3.3, respectively (survey conducted by the author from March 2023 to May 2024).

Based on the above survey results, the management of soft skills education activities for pedagogical students at these universities exhibits specific strengths and limitations, providing a clear roadmap for improvement:

3.1. Strengths

(1) University leaders have emphasized the establishment of goals for soft skills education; (2) Universities have developed programs and content for soft skills education; (3) Regular efforts are made to diversify the forms of soft skills education; (4) Participants involved in soft skills education are encouraged to employ diverse methods; (5) Activities have been organized to raise awareness of the role and responsibilities of those involved in soft skills education; (6) Significant achievements have been made in managing the learning and practice of soft skills; (7) Numerous activities have been implemented to monitor and supervise the soft skills education for students.

3.2. Limitations

(1) Each university has defined different goals for soft skills education; (2) The programs and content of soft skills education vary from one university to another; (3) The integration of soft skills education into general or specialized courses for pedagogical students is still limited; (4) The methods used in soft skills education do not fully meet the needs of students; (5) Clubs and social activities related to soft skills education have not been widely promoted, failing to attract a large number of students to participate.

3.3. Causes of the limitations

Objective causes: There has been a lack of specific direction and guidance from management levels; the budget allocated by the Ministry of Education and Training for the management of soft skills education activities is relatively low.

Subjective causes: The facilities do not meet the required standards; a suitable soft skills framework for each specific major has not been built; training courses on soft skills education and management of soft skill education are not regularly offered; there is a lack of recognition among managers, lecturers, and students of the significant benefits of soft skills education, learning, and practice.

Based on these strengths and existing limitations, the author proposes several fundamental solutions to enhance the effectiveness of soft skills education management for pedagogical students.

4. Solutions to enhance the efficiency of soft skills education management for pedagogical students

4.1. Developing, completing, and integrating a core soft skills framework into the curriculum for pedagogical students

Recognizing the unique professional needs of pedagogical students, it is imperative for universities to prioritize the development of a core soft skills framework tailored for these students. This framework, a cornerstone for managers, faculties, lecturers, and students, will not only enhance the quality of pedagogical student training but also meet the learning outcome requirements and practical demands of the profession and society. It will empower students to craft their own learning and development plans, underscoring the importance of this solution. To implement this, the following steps should be taken:

Step 1: The university rector, in a show of commitment, issues a decision to establish a Drafting Committee for the core soft skills framework for pedagogical students. This Committee, with its dedicated members, will shoulder the responsibility of developing the soft skills framework, ensuring it is not just up-to-date but also practical and effective.

Step 2: The Drafting Committee develops a plan for building the soft skills framework for pedagogical students. The plan should clearly

outline the objectives and necessity of building this framework, detail the activities that need to be organized during its development, assign tasks to various departments and individuals, establish a timeline and methods for implementation, and monitor and evaluate the results.

Step 3: The activities are implemented according to the developed plan. The Drafting Committee reviews relevant legal documents related to the orientation and graduation standards for pedagogical students, such as Circular No. 20/2018/TT-BGDĐT dated August 22, 2018, of the Ministry of Education and Training promulgating regulation on professional standards for teachers of general education institutions, and Resolution No. 29-NQ/TW dated November 04, 2013 of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam on fundamental and comprehensive innovation in education, serving industrialization and modernization in a socialist-oriented market economy during international integration. Subsequently, the Drafting Committee surveys the soft skills needed for students to help propose a soft skills framework that ensures practicality and relevance to reality and stimulates students' interest in learning.

Based on the results of the student needs survey and the suggestions from managers, lecturers, and experts, the Drafting Committee will compile the feedback and produce a draft of the necessary soft skills framework for students. A workshop, a platform for collaboration, should then be organized to invite experts and lecturers to discuss and comment on the draft soft skills framework. After collecting the feedback and making necessary revisions, the Committee will finalize the core soft skills framework for pedagogical students, ensuring that it meets specific criteria and practical requirements of pedagogical students. Finally, the Drafting Committee will submit the final soft skills

framework to the university leaders for approval of issuance. The finalized core soft skills framework will then be publicly announced and disseminated through various media channels to ensure that everyone is informed and can implement it accordingly.

Based on the analysis of the current state of soft skills education at pedagogical universities in Vietnam, the author proposes a core soft skills framework to equip students, including the following nine skills: (1) Self-awareness skills; (2) Teamwork skills; (3) Time management skills; (4) Communication skills; (5) Self-leadership skills; (6) Emotion control skills; (7) Crisis management skills; (8) Conflict resolution skills; (9) Creativity skills.

Developing this core soft skills framework is considered one of the critical solutions to enhance the effectiveness of managing soft skills education for pedagogical students today.

4.2. Directing functional units to diversify forms and methods of soft skills education for pedagogical students

Diversifying the forms and methods of soft skills education for pedagogical students aims to create a rich educational and training environment tailored to each student and student group, fostering enthusiasm for participation in training activities that align with current societal demands and requirements. Therefore, developing soft skills in students requires integrating various educational methods differently. Implementing this solution involves the following key aspects:

Firstly, university leaders should directly adjust the curriculum, making soft skills education mandatory or elective modules of the pedagogical program to align with practical requirements. Additionally, they should instruct faculties to revise the curriculum according to the Ministry of Education and Training's regulations and to supplement and update soft skills modules

within the training program. Enhancing the role of specialized faculties and lecturers in implementing these updates is also crucial.

Secondly, university leaders should direct the integration of soft skills education into the content of other modules, instruct lecturers to research methods for effectively integrating soft skills into their lectures, and ensure that lecturers assess students' learning outcomes, focusing on evaluating soft skills based on identified objectives.

Thirdly, university leaders should enhance the organization of professional experiential activities. This includes identifying forms of experiential activities, collaborating with organizations and agencies to support students in internships and practicums, and developing coordination plans for training. It also emphasizes the importance of exchange sessions between students and general schools, fostering a sense of shared responsibility in the audience.

Fourthly, university leaders should direct and enhance the activities of functional departments and organizations such as the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union and the Student Association by organizing skill competitions; collaborating with external organizations or inviting alumni to share and exchange experiences in studying, training, and the necessary skills for their work. There is a need for financial support to enhance these activities.

4.3. Building and developing a team of officers, lecturers, and forces involved in soft skills education for students

To improve the management and quality of soft skills education for pedagogical students, universities must build and develop a comprehensive team dedicated to soft skills education. This team should include managers, lecturers, academic advisors, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, the Student Association, and general schools where pedagogical students work after

graduation. The development of this team should leverage the existing internal resources of the university while also involving external societal forces to achieve the goals of soft skills education for students. Additionally, it is essential to include agencies and employers in the soft skills education process to contribute to the socialization and enhancement of the quality of soft skills education, meeting labor market requirements.

To effectively implement this solution, the following steps should be taken:

Firstly, organizing activities to raise awareness about the role of soft skills education for students among the participating forces in soft skills education. The university leaders should direct faculties to implement and emphasize this in faculty and department meetings. Precisely, department and faculty leaders should guide and orient lecturers to understand the importance of soft skills education, thereby effectively applying it in their teaching process.

Secondly, organizing training and capacity-building programs for lecturers, especially those who specialize in teaching soft skills, and for political-social organizations within the university. Through conferences, seminars, and scientific workshops, each officer and lecturer can recognize the importance of soft skills education and thus actively participate in teaching these skills to students. Currently, some universities have developed independent modules or courses on soft skills for students. Therefore, training and developing a team of lecturers specialized in soft skills education is not just a short-term solution but of long-term strategic significance, aiming to comprehensively improve the quality of soft skills education for students, greatly contributing to enhancing the overall quality of student training and shaping the future of education.

Thirdly, collaborating closely with external higher education institutions, research

institutes, and other organizations in the soft skills education process. This collaboration is not just beneficial but necessary for the success of the program. Alongside training lecturers specialized in soft skills education, universities should enhance the efficiency of managing soft skills education for pedagogical students by inviting experts with expertise and experience in soft skills education and management to share with lecturers. Faculties and departments should be directed to organize professional sessions focused on soft skills education for lecturers. This continuous learning and exchange of knowledge will ensure that the education system stays updated with the latest practices and remains at the forefront of soft skills education.

4.4. Directing the innovation of inspecting and evaluating soft skills education outcomes for students

The inspection and evaluation process is a crucial component in the management of soft skills education for pedagogical students. It plays a key role in identifying the outcomes of soft skills education, gathering feedback, orienting improvements, and making timely adjustments. This process also enables the provision of timely encouragement and incentives to motivate all parties involved in soft skills education. The steps involved in this process are as follows:

Step 1: identifying the objectives of inspection and evaluation

Step 2: developing an inspection and evaluation process

This step includes: (1) Developing an inspection and evaluation plan. The inspection and evaluation activities can be created as a separate plan or integrated into the overall inspection and evaluation plan of the university, with a focus on the outcomes of soft skills education for pedagogical students; (2) Selecting the content for inspection and evaluation based on the predetermined objectives and content of soft skills education;

(3) Selecting the inspection and evaluation methods. Various methods should be combined with a particular emphasis on practical evaluations, as the results of soft skills education are demonstrated through the practical operational abilities of pedagogical students; (4) Selecting the participants for the assessment. This includes managers, lecturers, academic advisors, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, and the Student Association; (5) Evaluating pedagogical students' soft skills education outcomes; (6) Making adjustments and improvements after the review. Students' achievement levels are assessed to determine appropriate adjustments and improvements.

Step 3: developing a set of standards for evaluating the outcomes of pedagogical students' soft skills education. Based on the core soft skills framework for pedagogical students, which has been established with nine critical soft skills, as mentioned above, universities should develop evaluation criteria set with multiple levels, ranging from low to high, corresponding to each soft skill.

4.5. Further coordinating closely with general education institutions to enhance the quality of soft skills education management for pedagogical students

This solution aims to evaluate the entire soft skills education process at universities. A key aspect of this evaluation is the collaboration with general education institutions. Their involvement provides a broader perspective and enhances the quality of the assessment. By gathering feedback from these institutions, universities training pedagogical students can assess the actual outcomes of their soft skills education activities, thereby making adjustments appropriate to reality.

To implement this solution effectively, university leaders must regularly exchange information with recruitment agencies and employers to control and assess the quality of

their training programs and make timely adjustments to the management of soft skills education. This helps build the university's trust, reputation, and brand name with employers regarding the pedagogical students they train. University leaders should instruct relevant departments, such as the Training Department, the Student Association, etc., to regularly gather and update contact information of current students and alums. For example, conducting surveys with alums to determine the employment rate within six months of graduation (this rate is an indicator of how well the students meet societal needs); surveying officers and lecturers at educational institutions where pedagogical students complete internships to assess the soft skills of these students; and surveying managers on the soft skills of alums at academic institutions where alums are employed.

5. Conclusions

Based on the survey of the current management of soft skills education for pedagogical students at several major pedagogical universities, the author has proposed five solutions to enhance the quality and efficiency of managing soft skills education for these students. For each proposed solution, the author has outlined the objectives, specified the content, and described the methods for effective implementation. The comprehensive implementation and synchronous application of these solutions will help pedagogical universities improve the efficiency and quality of managing soft skills education for their students, significantly contributing to the student's ability to successfully fulfill their educational roles, both in providing knowledge and in developing the character of future generations of students.

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