Development of Students' Soft Skills Through Activity Management in The Department of Islamic Education Management

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of event management in transforming the soft skills of students in the Islamic Education Management (MPI) Study Program at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University. Soft skills are non-technical competencies that are important for students' readiness to enter the workforce, such as communication, teamwork, time management, and leadership. Using a qualitative approach with a case study method, this research involved 63 students actively involved in organizing more than ten academic and student activities during the 2023/2024 academic year. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and activity documentation. The research findings indicate that students' direct involvement in every stage of event management—from planning, coordination, implementation, to evaluation—significantly contributes to strengthening their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. The integration of Islamic values such as honesty, responsibility, and work ethic reinforces students' character and professionalism in the context of teamwork and leadership. Institutional support in the form of faculty mentoring and infrastructure also plays a role in optimizing this experience-based learning process. This study concludes that event management can serve as an effective contextual learning strategy for the holistic development of students' soft skills. Recommendations are provided to integrate soft skills enhancement into the curriculum, expand interdisciplinary programs, and strengthen faculty training to ensure optimal guidance.

Keywords: Contextual Learning, Event Management, Islamic Education, Soft Skills, Students

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran manajemen event dalam mentransformasi soft skills mahasiswa di Program Studi Manajemen Pendidikan Islam (MPI) Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga. Soft skills merupakan kompetensi non-teknis yang penting bagi kesiapan mahasiswa menghadapi dunia kerja, seperti komunikasi, kerja sama, manajemen waktu, dan kepemimpinan. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus, penelitian ini melibatkan 63 mahasiswa yang aktif dalam penyelenggaraan lebih dari sepuluh kegiatan event akademik dan kemahasiswaan selama tahun akademik 2023/2024. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi kegiatan. Hasil

penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan langsung mahasiswa dalam setiap tahap manajemen event mulai dari perencanaan, koordinasi, pelaksanaan, hingga evaluasi berkontribusi signifikan terhadap penguatan keterampilan interpersonal dan intrapersonal mereka. Integrasi nilai-nilai Islami seperti kejujuran, tanggung jawab, dan etos kerja memperkuat dimensi karakter dan profesionalisme mahasiswa dalam konteks kerja tim dan kepemimpinan. Dukungan institusional berupa pembinaan dosen dan sarana prasarana turut berperan dalam mengoptimalkan proses pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman ini. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa manajemen event dapat menjadi strategi pembelajaran kontekstual yang efektif untuk pengembangan soft skills mahasiswa secara holistik. Rekomendasi diberikan untuk mengintegrasikan penguatan soft skills dalam kurikulum, memperluas program lintas disiplin, serta memperkuat pelatihan dosen pembimbing agar dapat memberikan pendampingan yang optimal.

Kata Kunci: *Mahasiswa, Manajemen Event, Pembelajaran Kontekstual, Pendidikan Islam, Soft Skills*

A. INTRODUCTION

Soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, time management, and leadership, are increasingly becoming crucial aspects in the development of students as future leaders. According to a report by the World Economic Forum, skills such as communication, creativity, adaptability, and teamwork are among the top 10 most in-demand skills in the 21st-century workplace (Muzakki, 2023). This finding aligns with recent research, as explained by Layton, who highlights that the development of non-technical skills is a key focus in the career development model for students (career cohort model)(Layton, Brandt, & Brennwald, 2020). Additionally, a study by Hall emphasizes that career success is significantly influenced by interpersonal skills that support the transition to paid and financially sustainable employment (Hall, Pavlakis, & Friend, 2022). Thus, individual success is not solely determined by mastery of technical knowledge but also by strong interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

The current workplace and social life demand individuals who are capable of critical thinking, collaboration, and integrity in leadership and communication (Pare & Sihotang, 2023). For example, the ability to work in diverse teams, make sound decisions, and lead with ethics are crucial factors in managing interpersonal relationships and resolving conflicts within organizations. Therefore, higher education institutions, including the Islamic Education Management Program (MPI) at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, have a significant responsibility to produce graduates who are not only academically outstanding but also possess strong character and social competencies.

In higher education, the development of soft skills is often positioned as a complement to hard skills (Rati, Paramartha, Widiastini, & Agustika, 2024). However, in the context of the MPI Study Program at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, the strengthening of soft skills has been explicitly integrated into the curriculum through the compulsory Event Management course. This course provides students with real-world opportunities to gain hands-on experience in planning, coordinating, executing, and evaluating an event. Values such as

responsibility, collaboration, and leadership are not only taught theoretically but also practiced contextually in actual event activities.

Event management activities have proven to be effective in training students to face the challenges of the dynamic world of work (Ramadhania, Abid, Abi Suroso, & Permata, 2024). These activities serve as an experiential learning medium that emphasizes the development of analytical skills, decision-making, and problem-solving (Wardani, 2023). In their implementation, students are trained to work in teams, coordinate with various external parties such as sponsors and speakers, and develop effective communication strategies (Rati et al., 2024). Each stage of the activity, from planning to evaluation, encourages students to grow in terms of social and emotional skills (Lestari et al., 2024).

As a leading Islamic university, Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University also emphasizes the integration of Islamic values into the educational process. Values such as honesty, hard work, work ethics, and integrity form the ethical framework for the implementation of student event management. Thus, the development of soft skills is not only focused on career readiness but also on the formation of Islamic character, which serves as an important foundation for professional and social life. Therefore, it is important to further evaluate how the Event Management course contributes to transforming students' soft skills in a measurable and structured manner.

This paper aims to highlight the importance of developing soft skills in higher education, particularly in the context of the Islamic Education Management (MPI) Study Program at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University. This paper emphasizes that mastery of non-technical skills such as communication, teamwork, time management, and leadership is crucial in preparing students to become future leaders who are ready to face the complexities of the workplace and social life. More specifically, this paper aims to first, emphasize the urgency of developing soft skills in the 21st century based on various research findings and global reports. Second, explain the strategic role of the Event Management course as part of the MPI curriculum in developing students' soft skills in a practical and contextual manner. Third, emphasize the integration of Islamic values in the process of character development through experiential learning activities. Fourth, to encourage more measurable and structured evaluation of the impact of Event Management learning on the transformation of students' soft skills. Thus, this paper serves as a conceptual and practical foundation for understanding and evaluating the contribution of experience-based learning in strengthening students' non-academic competencies.

B. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach (Albi & Setiawan, 2018) with a case study method to analyze the transformation of students' soft skills through their involvement in event management in the Islamic Education Management Study Program (MPI) at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University Yogyakarta. This approach was chosen because it provides space to gain a deep and contextual understanding of the process of developing students' interpersonal and intrapersonal skills through real-life experiences in event management.

The research subjects were active MPI students who had participated in at least two events during the 2023/2024 academic year. A total of 63 students were selected as participants using purposive sampling, considering their level of involvement in event planning, implementation, and evaluation. In addition to students, supporting informants were

also involved, namely academic advisors and academic activity managers, to strengthen contextual and operational data related to event organization.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques: in-depth interviews, direct participatory observation, and documentary study. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide focused on students' experiences in various aspects of event management. Observations were conducted directly during event implementation, with the researcher acting as an active observer. Meanwhile, documentation was obtained from activity reports, photos, and videos recording students' activities during the event.

To ensure data validity, this study used source and method triangulation techniques, which involved comparing the results of interviews, observations, and existing documents. Additionally, member checking was conducted with key informants to ensure the accuracy of data interpretation, and an audit trail was compiled as a systematic record of the entire data collection and processing process.

Data analysis was conducted in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved filtering and sorting important information from the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Data presentation was conducted in the form of thematic descriptive narratives, which described the relationships between categories. The final stage is the drawing of reflective conclusions to address the research focus on the effectiveness of event management in developing students' soft skills.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSION

1. Event management as a practical learning medium

Event management is one of the most effective learning tools for developing students' soft skills, particularly in the context of Islamic higher education. This concept is closely aligned with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of real-world experiences as a means of building knowledge and skills. As explained by Silva, the constructivist approach enables students to actively construct understanding through direct engagement in complex and dynamic real-world situations, reflecting the learning needs of the 21st century in higher education. (Silva et al., 2022).

Research by Tariq and Abonamah shows that active participation in campus activities significantly contributes to the improvement of leadership, communication, and problem-solving skills (Tariq & Abonamah, 2021). This aligns with the field data in this study: out of 63 students interviewed, 88.9% (56 students) stated that their experience in event management directly improved their decision-making and effective communication skills.

a. Event planning and implementation

During the planning process, students are required to design activity proposals, prepare budgets, and set activity schedules. These tasks hone their systematic and analytical thinking skills and increase their sense of responsibility for the success of the activity. Research by Savova and Aleksandrova indicates that student involvement in activity-based project planning can improve critical and analytical thinking skills, as well as awareness of social responsibility in the decision-making process. (Savova, Aleksandrova, & Eftimova, 2021).

During the implementation phase, students collaborate with various parties, such as venue providers, sponsors, and external speakers. Their ability to adapt to

unexpected conditions, such as schedule changes or technical disruptions, trains their flexibility and personal resilience. Delplancq emphasizes that adaptability, quick problem solving, and interpersonal communication are core competencies in the development of soft skills for the future generation of professionals (Delplancq et al., 2024).

b. Evaluation of activities and reflection on experiences

Evaluation is an important stage in which students are encouraged to reflect on their work processes and results in a systematic manner. Based on observations of seven major events that were held, students who actively participated in the evaluation process showed significant improvement in their critical and analytical thinking skills. Research by López-González shows that reflection-based learning strategies after practical activities can substantially develop students' cognitive awareness and critical thinking skills. (López-González, Sosa, Sánchez, & Faure-Carvallo, 2023). A total of 46 out of 63 students (73%) in this study stated that post-event reflection sessions were very helpful in identifying personal and team strengths and weaknesses, and served as important preparation for future activities.

c. Collaboration as the key to developing soft skills

Collaboration is one of the most essential soft skills in today's workplace. In the context of event management, collaboration becomes a real-world experience that tests and develops students' teamwork skills. Research by Santillan-Jimenez shows that student involvement in multidisciplinary teams significantly improves cross-functional communication skills, social empathy, and the ability to resolve conflicts productively. (Santillan-Jimenez, Schutzman, & Mabisi, 2022). This finding is reflected in this study, in which 85.7% (54 out of 63 students) assessed that their experience in team collaboration improved their interpersonal and participatory leadership skills.

d. Team-based learning theory

This concept is in line with the Team-Based Learning (TBL) approach, which emphasizes collaborative learning as the key to improving student competence. Hu and Singla explain that the application of collaboration-based TBL methods, such as jigsaw learning techniques and active role sharing within teams, has been proven effective in improving communication skills, individual responsibility, and group cohesion in the context of professional learning (Fan, Hu, & Singla, 2020). In every event activity, MPI students learn to distribute tasks, listen to team members' ideas, and build consensus through active discussions that reflect TBL practices

e. Team collaboration challenges

Although beneficial, teamwork is not without its challenges. Role conflicts, personality differences, and imbalances in contributions often arise during event implementation. Some students reported that in large-scale events, less active team members created an uneven workload. However, 40 out of 63 students (63.5%) stated that they successfully managed conflicts through the support of facilitators and academic advisors. This indicates that external guidance plays a strategic role in fostering healthy team dynamics. Tariq and Abonamah also emphasize that the role

of facilitators in collaborative learning is crucial in helping students overcome interpersonal challenges and enhance teamwork effectiveness. (Tariq & Abonamah, 2021).

2. Challenges and solutions in event management

Students face various challenges in their involvement in event activities, particularly related to first-time experiences, technical uncertainties, and internal conflicts. Sardinha revealed that novice students often experience high anxiety and unpreparedness when facing their first managerial responsibilities. (Sardinha, Sousa, Leite, & Carvalho, 2021). This is in line with the findings of this study, in which approximately 31.7% (20 students) mentioned that during the first event, they felt insecure and confused about dividing roles.

However, through a system of faculty mentoring and guidance, as well as post-event reflection sessions, students showed significant progress. Faculty-facilitated reflection encouraged students to evaluate their achievements and mistakes and to devise improvement strategies. Kahai emphasized that the reflective process and metacognitive guidance were able to build leadership resilience and improve students' readiness to make decisions in real-life situations (Kahai, Jestice, & Huang, 2023).

Most students (84%) stated that after participating in two events, they felt more prepared, organized, and confident to take on greater managerial roles.

3. Relevance to Islamic values

One of the distinctive features of soft skills development in the MPI Study Program at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University is the integration of Islamic values in the learning process, including in event management activities. This is in line with Pooravari's findings, which show that Islamic value-based character education effectively shapes students' work ethics, especially when applied through applied activities such as committee work and project management. (Pooravari, Zandipour, Pooravari, & Salehi, 2016). A total of 92% of 63 students stated that values such as honesty, responsibility, and hard work were strongly emphasized by their supervisors during the event, and that this helped them maintain their integrity in facing professional challenges.

Islamic values directly contribute to the development of soft skills such as integrity, discipline, honest communication, and empathy towards fellow team members and the community (Alfani, Mukhsin, Khusnadin, Addzaky, & Mawaddah, 2025). Students not only become good organizers but also academically ethical individuals focused on social benefit (Fahuzi & Alfani, 2022). Kunt emphasizes that character development rooted in Islamic values fosters the growth of students' social skills, including empathy, collaboration, and responsibility within the complex and digital context of campus life (Kunt, Pamuk, & Jamanov, 2024).

In addition, the development of soft skills based on Islamic values in the Islamic Education Management Study Program also creates a holistic and transformative learning environment (Alfani, 2023). The learning process does not only focus on academic achievement, but also on the formation of a well-rounded personality. Through active student involvement in activities such as seminars, leadership training, and event management, they are accustomed to reflecting on the spiritual meaning of every action (Alfani, Mukhsin, & Mawaddah, 2024; Dawis et al., 2023). This approach encourages

students to understand that work ethic and professionalism are part of practicing faith values in real life, so that the development of soft skills becomes more meaningful and sustainable.

The influence of these values is also evident in the increased social awareness of students toward societal issues. In various events, students are encouraged to design programs that are not only technically successful but also have a positive impact on the surrounding community. This approach strengthens students' ability to think critically, develop strategies, and manage resources wisely while upholding Islamic ethics. As a result, the soft skills developed not only support career readiness but also equip students with a strong moral foundation to become agents of change amid global social challenges. (Umam, Alfani, Khusnadin, & Bustomi, 2025).

4. **Implications for the world of work**

Involvement in event management prepares students to face the complexities of the working world. Skills such as communication, leadership, collaboration, and time management are considered by employers as key indicators of graduates' readiness for the workforce. Tariq and Abonamah emphasize that soft skills such as innovation, communication, leadership, and collaboration are the most sought-after elements in today's workplace, and experiential learning methods like project management are effective tools for developing them. (Tariq & Abonamah, 2021).

a. **Communication and leadership**

A total of 89% of students mentioned that after being involved in two or more events, they felt more confident to speak in public and lead small teams. This finding is in line with Steele and Waggenspack who showed that organizational experiences such as peer mentoring in campus projects have a significant impact on improving strategic communication and quick decision-making in university students. (Steele, Waggenspack, & Odenwald, 2021).

b. **Collaboration and time management**

Students also stated that through the event experience, they were able to prioritize work, divide tasks within the team, and complete projects efficiently. Layton corroborated these findings through a cross-faculty team-based career model study, which showed that collaborative work accelerates the internalization of real work skills in a campus context. (Layton et al., 2020).

c. **Ethics and moral values in professionalism**

Islamic values such as trustworthiness and honesty become the foundation of professionalism that is recognized in the workplace. Pooravari asserts that students with Islamic-based character training are more valued by industry for their ability to maintain ethics and moral stability under high work pressure. (Pooravari et al., 2016).

d. **Demands organizational, communication, and leadership skills**

Students involved in organizing events will be trained in dealing with time pressure, managing budgets, developing schedules, and working in cross-functional teams. These skills are in high demand in almost all fields of work, as they reflect proficiency in project management, quick decision-making, and adaptability to dynamic

situations. The experience also strengthens students' mental resilience in the face of uncertainty and pressure, which are integral to the professional world. They learn to stay focused and productive amidst resource constraints and time crunches, while maintaining effective communication with all stakeholders (Bairizki, 2021).

e. Employment opportunities

Event management can open up job opportunities for students in various sectors. Starting from the creative industry, tourism, to large corporations now require experts in this field, both as event planners, event coordinators, and marketing and communication professionals. This makes event management one of the strategic fields that support economic growth and job creation. (Purnomo, 2016).

Overall, event management is not only important in the context of celebration or promotion, but also has real implications for the readiness of a workforce that is adaptive, creative, and able to work under pressure. Therefore, mastering event management skills will be a significant plus in facing challenges and competition in the current and future world of work.

D. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that event management plays a significant role in the development of soft skills of students of the Islamic Education Management Study Program (MPI) Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University. The active involvement of students in various stages of organizing events ranging from planning, coordination, to evaluation provides real experience that encourages the improvement of communication skills, teamwork, time management, and leadership. In addition, this process strengthens students' Islamic character through the internalization of values such as honesty, responsibility, work ethic, and integrity. Institutional support in the form of lecturer guidance, availability of facilities, and collaborative culture among students also strengthen the effectiveness of this strategy as a contextual learning medium.However, to ensure that the transformation of soft skills that occurs is sustainable and measurable, further efforts are needed in the form of longitudinal evaluation. Therefore, it is recommended that a longitudinal study be conducted that examines the impact of event management on students' soft skills after they enter the workforce. This follow-up study can identify the extent to which the skills developed through event activities during the study period actually contribute to the professional success and social resilience of graduates.With a long-term evaluative approach and interdisciplinary collaboration, event management has great potential to improve the lives of students.

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the approach used is still short-term, so it cannot reveal the long-term impact of soft skills development on the work readiness of graduates. In addition, the scope of the study is limited to students of the Islamic Education Management Study Program (MPI) at Sunan Kalijaga Islamic State University, so the results cannot be generalized to a broader context. This study also did not involve external perspectives, such as alumni or employers, who could provide objective assessments of the actual contribution of soft skills in the workplace. Furthermore, the measurement of soft skills is still qualitative and does not use

standardized instruments, and there is a potential for participant bias since it only involves students who are active in event management activities. These limitations highlight the need for further research using a longitudinal and interdisciplinary collaborative approach to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Future researchers are advised to use a longitudinal approach to examine the long-term impact of soft skills development and expand the scope of the study to other programs and institutions to make the results more representative. Involving alumni and employers of graduates will provide a more objective perspective, and the use of standardized evaluation instruments can enhance data validity. Interdisciplinary collaboration is also recommended to enrich the analysis.

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