



Education, Soft Skills, and Character in Strengthening Human Resource Competitiveness

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Abstract

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The quality of Human Resources serves as a crucial determinant in driving economic growth and national competitiveness amid globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Education plays a strategic role in shaping human capital that excels not only in academic achievement but also in the development of robust soft skills and strong moral character. This study aims to analyze the interrelationship between education, soft skills, and character in enhancing the quality of competitive and globally resilient. Through a comprehensive literature review of recent scholarly works, the findings reveal that the advancement of soft skills such as communication, collaboration, and leadership alongside the cultivation of character attributes including integrity and adaptability, significantly contributes to a nation's productivity, innovation, and economic performance. Therefore, the education system must be directed toward strengthening holistic competencies to ensure that Indonesia's human resources possess the intellectual capacity, ethical foundation, and adaptive skills necessary to compete effectively on the global stage.



1. Introduction

High-quality Human Resources (HR) are the main pillar in building a nation's progress, especially in the era of globalization and the Industrial Revolution 4.0, which is fraught with rapid change and fierce competition. Superior HR is not only determined by academic ability but also by non-technical capacities such as soft skills and strong character, which form the moral and social foundation for work. Education plays a vital role in shaping the quality of HR through a learning process oriented towards developing knowledge, skills, and values relevant to the needs of the times (Samsuri et al., 2024). In the context of higher education, institutions have the responsibility to prepare graduates who are not only cognitively competent but also adaptive to global changes. Research shows that 80% of a person's success in the workplace is determined by soft skills, while only 20% is determined by hard skills (Tyas et al., 2020). This indicates that the formation of character and soft skills such as communication ability, teamwork, and leadership are key determinants in increasing workforce productivity and competitiveness.

Character education is a major focus in strengthening HR quality. A strong character reflects the integrity, discipline, and responsibility needed to face global social and economic dynamics. Through character education, students are expected to be able to internalize moral and ethical values that shape professional behavior and are oriented towards the nation's progress. Furthermore, the development of soft skills based on collaborative experience and contextual learning in the educational environment can increase individual readiness to enter the complex world of work (Marzuki et al., 2024).

Non-technical skills such as critical thinking ability, interpersonal communication, adaptability to change, and leadership skills are now the main demands in the modern workplace. According to Mattajang (2023), soft skills are not inherent individual traits but competencies that can be developed through learning and social experience. Therefore, education must provide space for the systematic development of soft skills through extracurricular activities, project-based learning, and collaborative practices.

The link between education and improving national competitiveness cannot be separated from the role of education in shaping innovative HR. Maulana et al. (2024) affirm that higher education must integrate the development of hard skills and soft skills into its curriculum so that graduates can adapt to the needs of industry and global society. HR that has a balance between technical competence and adaptive personality will be better prepared to face the challenges of digitalization and automation in the future. In relation to national development, high-quality HR is the key to increasing the nation's competitiveness in various sectors, including the economy, education, and technology. Education plays a strategic role in developing human potential through the transfer of knowledge as well as character building.

Thus, the integration of character education and soft skills into the national education system is a fundamental step to create a generation that is not only intellectually smart but also has social empathy, moral responsibility, and a high spirit of innovation (Rudyshyn et al., 2020). Education acts as a bridge between individual development and national progress. In the era of globalization, the success of a country is largely determined by the capacity of its education system to produce HR

that is characterized, competent, and able to adapt to change. Thus, improving HR quality through character and soft skill-based education is not only a necessity but also a strategic investment for the nation's highly competitive future on the global stage.

2. Methods

This research applies the literature review method as the main approach to analyze the relationship between education, soft skills, character, and the quality of HR in an effort to enhance national competitiveness. The choice of the literature review method is based on its ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of theories, concepts, and findings from previous research relevant to this study's topic. This approach focuses on the process of collection, critical review, and synthesis of various scientific sources that have been published in academic journals, research reports, and policy documents within the last five years.

The first step in this research was the identification of relevant literature. This process was carried out by searching various scientific articles through databases such as Google Scholar or Research Gate using keywords: "human resource quality", "education", "soft skills", "character", and "competitiveness". The search results were then selected based on established inclusion criteria, namely literature that directly discusses the influence of education on HR development and its connection to soft skills and character in the context of globalization and digital transformation. Articles that did not meet the publication year criteria or were irrelevant to the context of education and HR development were excluded from the analysis process.

The second stage was content analysis of the selected literature. At this stage, each source was studied in depth to identify thematic patterns, common ideas, and different perspectives in highlighting the role of education in strengthening HR quality. The analysis included a review of theoretical concepts such as human capital theory, social learning theory, and character education paradigms that support the strengthening of non-technical competencies. Data obtained from various sources were then synthesized to find conceptual and causal relationships between education, soft skills, character, and the increase in national competitiveness.

The third stage was thematic synthesis, where the analysis results were categorized into four main themes: (1) the role of formal and non-formal education in developing HR competencies, (2) the contribution of soft skills to improving workforce performance and productivity, (3) the urgency of character education in forming integrity and work ethics, and (4) the relationship between HR quality and national competitiveness. This approach allowed the researcher to formulate conceptual and applicative conclusions based on empirical findings from various relevant studies.

The application of this literature review method aims to affirm the strategic position of education in forming superior, strong-character HR with high adaptability to global changes. Through this systematic approach, this research is expected to provide a solid theoretical foundation for the development of education policies oriented toward improving HR quality and strengthening national competitiveness in the modern era.

3. Results

The literature review indicates that education plays a significant role in improving the quality and competitiveness of HR through strengthening academic competence, developing social skills (soft skills), and forming resilient character. Education functions not only as a means of knowledge transfer but also as a process of holistic personality formation. In the context of higher education, developing student competence is insufficient if it only focuses on technical abilities or hard skills alone. It also requires strengthening interpersonal skills, communication, collaboration, and leadership, which are the core of soft skills. Research conducted by Maulana et al.(2024) affirms that the combination of hard skills, soft skills, and self-efficacy contributes significantly to improving HR quality in the university environment. These findings show the urgency of a holistic educational approach in producing graduates who are not only academically competent but also ready to adapt to dynamic global challenges.

High HR quality has been shown to have a direct relationship with increasing a nation's competitiveness. According to Samsuri et al. (2024), strengthening human capital through increasing professional competence and mastering soft skills can reinforce a country's global competitive position. Education that prioritizes the development of social abilities, professional ethics, and critical thinking skills will encourage the creation of a workforce that is productive, innovative, and adaptive to technological changes. In this context, higher education institutions have a strategic role as centers for developing human capital oriented towards forming

creative, competitive individuals capable of contributing to national industry and economic progress.

Education also plays a vital role as an instrument for character formation, which becomes the moral foundation for individuals in social and professional life. Tyas et al. (2020) emphasize that character is an integral element of the education system that contributes greatly to the formation of superior HR. Values such as discipline, responsibility, empathy, and integrity are key components that strengthen a person's personal quality in the workplace. Without a solid character, technical abilities and academic intelligence alone will not be enough to sustain long-term success. Therefore, the integration of character education into the formal curriculum is a necessity, in order to foster a generation that is not only intellectually smart but also moral, ethical, and highly integrated.

Furthermore, the development of soft skills is proven to have a significant impact on improving organizational productivity and performance. Marzuki et al.(2024) explain that soft skills training in higher education environments contributes significantly to improving HR quality. Learning models that integrate hard skills training with soft skills development can strengthen student self-confidence, social responsibility, and adaptability in facing the dynamics of the working world. This aligns with the needs of modern industry, which demands workers with high interpersonal and collaborative abilities. Today's working world does not only evaluate competence based on technical ability but also considers the ability to communicate, work in teams, and solve problems creatively.

At the national level, improving the quality of education has a positive impact on the economic progress and competitiveness of a country. Agit et al. (2024) affirm that strengthening HR quality through formal and non-formal education channels contributes greatly to increasing national productivity and innovation. Education that emphasizes the holistic development of individual potential will produce competent, creative, and innovative HR. Quality HR is not only able to meet market needs but also to create new jobs through innovation and entrepreneurship. Thus, investment in the education sector is a strategic step in strengthening the foundations of sustainable development and increasing the nation's economic competitiveness at the global level.

In addition to the economic aspect, quality education also has a fundamental role in forming a society that is adaptive to social, technological, and economic changes. Tarigan and Fadillah (2023) explain that adaptability, critical thinking, and mastery of 21st-century competencies are key elements in facing the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era. HR with flexible skills and high interpersonal competence will more easily adapt to the constantly changing dynamics of the global job market. Therefore, educational institutions need to innovate in curriculum design based on industry needs so that graduates have high relevance and competitiveness in the job market. The competence and character-based approach is an effective education model for answering the demands of the times.

Research conducted by Deffinika et al. (2021) shows that education and training oriented towards 21st-century skills contribute tangibly to increasing the global competitiveness of the Indonesian workforce. Through training programs

that emphasize cross-disciplinary cooperation, collaboration, and the use of digital technology, Indonesian HR can increase efficiency and work productivity. Skills such as cross-cultural communication, team collaboration, and mastery of information technology are key aspects in facing the flow of workforce globalization. Thus, the education system must be designed not only to produce graduates with high academic competence but also to form individuals capable of working effectively in multicultural and technology-based environments.

Furthermore, the findings of Sumual et al. (2024) affirm that the role of education in the digital era needs to be directed towards the development of innovative and creative HR. Education is no longer understood merely as a process of knowledge transfer from educator to student, but rather as a process of transforming character, values, and adaptive abilities in accordance with technological developments and global job market needs. This paradigm shift demands an active role from educational institutions in integrating character values, technology mastery, and critical thinking skills into every learning process (Chetry, 2024). Thus, education can be the main driver in producing a generation with high creative power, strong character, and the ability to compete globally.

From the various research results and analysis, it can be concluded that the synergy between education, soft skills development, and character formation is a fundamental component in improving HR quality. Education acts as a means for developing intellectual and professional abilities, soft skills form interpersonal, collaborative, and leadership abilities, while character education strengthens the moral foundation, work ethics, and social responsibility of the individual (Iksal et al.,

2024). These three elements are interconnected and inseparable in the process of forming superior HR.

In the context of national development, improving HR quality through a holistic educational approach is the main key for Indonesia to compete on the global stage and realize sustainable development. The integration of hard skills, soft skills, and character values will create a generation that is not only competent and productive but also has social sensitivity, professional ethics, and a strong national spirit. Therefore, strengthening character education and soft skills development must be a priority in national education policy to produce human resources who are superior, highly integrated, and competitive in the era of globalization.

4. Conclusion

Education, soft skills, and character are the three main pillars in building Human Resources (HR) that are superior and highly competitive. The results of the study indicate that education functions not only as a means of knowledge transfer but also as a platform for forming values, attitudes, and life skills essential for individual success in the world of work and global society. The development of soft skills such as communication, collaboration, leadership, and critical thinking ability is a key factor in increasing productivity and innovation, while character education strengthens integrity, responsibility, and professional ethics, which form the moral foundation for quality HR.

The synergy between these three elements produces individuals who are not only academically competent but also adaptive to social and technological changes.

Therefore, the education system in Indonesia needs to continuously integrate character and soft skill-based learning into the curriculum in order to produce a superior generation oriented towards national progress. Thus, improving HR quality through holistic education becomes a strategic investment in strengthening national competitiveness in a dynamic and competitive global era.

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