



## Narrative Study: Soft Skills Based on the Life Experiences of Culinary Entrepreneurs

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### Abstract

Entrepreneurship is one of the goals of vocational education besides working and continuing education. Around 85% of soft skills can answer the success of students or vocational graduates including culinary majors. But there are many obstacles that must be faced, such as tight competition in the world of work and even the difficulty of building your own business. With these problems, we aim to deepen some of the soft skills needed by students or vocational graduates in the culinary field. The descriptive narrative method with in-depth interviews with culinary maestros was carried out to obtain these soft skills. The culinary maestros we interviewed are some of those who certainly have a culinary business and are easy for us to reach or meet with the accidental sampling technique we found three culinary maestros that we interviewed. Our findings are 1) communicative & friendly; 2) motive or desire & Decision-making including problem solving; 3) perseverance & tenacity; 4) discipline & honesty; 5) cooperation & adaptability; 6) creative & innovative. These findings will have an impact on culinary students or graduates and even other vocational fields, and of course with proper guidance from educators.

### Keywords

culinary entrepreneur experience; narrative study; soft skills;  
tvvt

## INTRODUCTION

Competence is an important thing for every individual to have (Rakasiwi et al., 2023) which will have an impact on a person's life and even a country. In relation to competence, there are indeed many elements that support it, one of which is through education. Education has levels, one of which is formal education with a culinary major, both vocational school (SMK in Bahasa) and undergraduate degrees (S1<sup>st</sup> in Bahasa) and the like. Referring to Perpres No. 8 (2012) concerning the Indonesian National Qualification Framework (KKNI in Bahasa) levels 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup>, the culinary major education

level is included in the practical or analytical category, specifically at levels 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>. At this level, students are required to have several competencies, considering also the development of the curriculum that requires graduates to be able to have these things in order to be able to compete in the global market (Syahril et al., 2023).

Culinary majors or similar have learning themes aimed at enabling students to build the desired business, and the question arises of how students are able to design their own business and compete in the global market (Suhairi et al., 2023). The results of the pre-study show that many students want to have their own business or work on it while in school or college, but because the competition in the world of work is very tight, full of adrenaline, and requires a lot of work experience, it causes them (the students) to think dozens of times to do it. The student's statement was emphasized (OECD, 2019) which revealed that job competition varies greatly depending on the needs and relevance of current developments. Findings (Jaya & Mukhlisin, 2021; Kurniawan et al., 2020; Mirzagitova et al., 2015) expressing competence is an important factor in realizing all of this, because a competency-based approach is very suitable to be applied in the educational process related to the cognitive, affective, psychomotor aspects and can be evaluated. Although the findings can be thwarted by individuals who have a lot of money, not everyone has it to build their own business directly, for example these students.

There are many reasons why students do not dare to start their own businesses, such as internal and external factors for the students, moreover the average culinary student is included in the category of generation Z, even generation Alpha. This generation is considered very creative but has minimal experience and tends to be individualistic, and there are still many factors behind this, such as the rapid development of technology including social media, then social and cultural environmental factors (Dreyer & Stojanová, 2023; Fadlurrohman et al., 2020; Rosmi et al., 2020; Widari et al., 2023). So, it can be concluded that students still lack references or need guidance so that they are able to realize their dreams. Related to this problem, the question arises what students must prepare to be able to work while going to school or college or even have their own business. The literature states that to realize this dream, soft skills must be deepened and honed (Borms et al., 2023; McGrath & Yamada, 2023). This statement is reinforced by the finding (Muhmin, 2018) which states that around 85% of soft skills are able to answer or influence a person's success. Soft skills are components of competence that support hard skills in the field of interest or mastery of students, there are many sub-aspects of soft skills that can be

used as references to build or realize it, such as communicative, critical & logical thinking, problem solving and so on (Angelelli et al., 2023; Mikhailova et al., 2022; Şenocak & Demirkıran, 2023). However, it is not yet fully known what the sub-aspects of soft skills are, so the big question is what the soft skills are to become an entrepreneur for culinary arts students so that they can go to school or college while working and even have their own business.

This study tries to dissect what soft skills are needed to become an entrepreneur for culinary majors, by telling various perspectives or views and experiences from several maestros of entrepreneurs related to the culinary engineering major so that they can be studied, understood and practiced. So that it is hoped that after finding tips based on direct experience from the maestros, it will make culinary students more sensitive and understand the importance of the process in life.

## METHOD

The method used in this study is narrative with a qualitative approach. This method tells how individuals experience, with narratives allowing individuals to tell their experiences in their own words (Blackie et al., 2023), the context of this study is business actors in the culinary field. The population in this study are practitioners or entrepreneurs in the culinary field with accidental sampling techniques, this technique is a type of non-probability sampling in which members of the target population meet certain criteria, such as availability at a certain time or a population that is easily accessible to researchers (Indra et al., 2023). The data collection technique in this study was an in-depth interview with several business actors in the culinary field. Table 1 is information from the participants of this study. The data analysis technique in this study used the Miles & Huberman interactive data analysis model which consists of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Widari et al., 2024), after that, triangulation was applied, namely with relevant sources, such as journals, books or trusted websites.

**Table 1.** Participant Information

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Educational Background</b>	<b>Enterprises</b>	<b>Work Experience &amp; Entrepreneurship</b>
<b>Dana</b>	Male	58	Faculty of Economics Management	Event Organizer, and Culinary	≥ 32 Years
<b>Adi</b>	Male	36	Faculty of Economic	Culinary	≥ 25 Years
<b>Hidayat</b>	Male	30	Faculty of Development Economics	Clothes, Education, and Culinary	≥ 23 Years

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of interviews with informants, Dana started his business after graduating from college, but Dana is the child of an entrepreneur in the city of Jakarta, then Adi started to know about business when he was 10<sup>th</sup> years old, while Hidayat started his business when he was in 1<sup>st</sup> grade of elementary school, and Hidayat's family does have an entrepreneurial background. The following are the participants' narratives about their identities as entrepreneurs.

### DANA

Dana is a man who lives with one wife and two children. Dana's background is the child of a transportation entrepreneur in the city of Jakarta. He was born in the city of Yogyakarta but from elementary school to high school he went to school in the city of Jakarta. While he was in elementary school to high school, he was only busy studying and helping his parents' work running a business, but he had no intention of becoming an entrepreneur, but he really liked Information Technology (IT) and Management. *"Incidentally, my family is an entrepreneur working in the transportation sector, then I was originally born in Yogyakarta but from elementary school to high school I lived in the city of Jakarta, even though my family comes from an entrepreneurial background, I have an ambition to become an IT and management in a large company."* Dana's dream slowly began to come true, this was proven by his acceptance to study at a campus in Yogyakarta, specifically in the Management Economics department around 1987<sup>th</sup>, since then he began to study many things. *"Precisely in 1987<sup>th</sup> I returned to my hometown (Yogyakarta), I studied economics majoring in management. From here I built relationships and learned many things"*. After graduating from college, Dana was invited by his friend to work at a telecommunications company in the city of Semarang. *"After I graduated, I had time to work as a radio announcer, journalist, mentor or instructor and had time to build a company from scratch with several people related to telecommunications"*.

Around the year 2000<sup>th</sup>, with the wealth of experience he had, Dana tried to build his own business with his wife. *"Around the year 2000<sup>th</sup>, my wife and I chose to start our own business, but my wife was still working as a Human Resources Development (HRD) at a hotel in Yogyakarta. After having some discussions with my wife, we both decided that my wife would still work as an HRD and I would become an Event Organizer (EO), but we also had plans to do business in a specific scope, namely culinary."* Dana has continued

*to work in his profession for years, working with various types of individuals. "Since I decided to become an EO, I have gained a lot of experience, such as how to manage myself, understand & understand other people, build relationships, communication, and no less importantly, be professional."*

Dana has run various events, and suddenly the Covid-19 virus came in 2020<sup>th</sup> which forced Dana and his wife to think hard to survive. *"2020<sup>th</sup> was the last year my wife and I stopped working as EO and HRD, as far as I remember February was the last month my wife and I held the event and the requirements to support this event (at that time the last month this event was held at a well-known campus in the city of Yogyakarta)".* After the event was over, there was news that Covid-19 hitting the world, so all activities at that time were restricted. *"We never thought that our respective professions or jobs would end that year, but we remembered that there was still one more option to survive, which was to have a culinary business with an online sales method, because we got a lot of information that this method was the most appropriate when the pandemic hit, and coincidentally at that time we were not allowed to go out or meet in person, so we decided to sell our products using the online sales method. Our business slogan at that time was "AS DELICIOUS AS MOTHER'S COOKING".* However, initially the products we sold only sold a little, so we made a promo of buy two get one free or directly selling three products at once for Rp.300,000, -. Well, the peak of using this promo method was that we were flooded with orders from Sabang to Merauke, but on average those who bought our products were not for their own consumption, but to be shared with the families who bought them, so we had to be ready to launch our products from the city of Yogyakarta to all over Indonesia".

Dana was very happy that the products they offered sold well. However, even though the products sold well, Dana's business faced many obstacles. *"At that time, the products we offered were quite in demand by various groups, although our products sold well, there were several obstacles that we faced such as internal and external problems, even so we had to keep trying how to manage everything and be professional with the situation we were experiencing. One time we were busy taking care of the Online business that we were running, suddenly there was a disaster that we had to face, at that time my mother was sick so my wife and I had to stay at home often and do routine check-ups to the hospital, so our Online business had to be temporarily suspended because we had to focus on taking care of my mother, even though we had taken care of all matters related to the Online business*

". As time went by, Dana and his wife began to get ideas to rebuild their business but still in the same scope, namely culinary, which could be done at home while also taking care of Dana's parents. *"After knowing that my parents had to be treated intensively, my wife and I tried to find a way out. How can we still run our business while taking care of my parents? The idea arose to build a business at home, so since then around 2021<sup>st</sup> we started building our business in the same scope, namely culinary with the concept of home-cooked food and family or hereditary recipes."* In other words, Dana and his wife consider that this is their family concept and not the same as other people.

Time after time, the business with the concept of home-cooked food and family recipes that they have has become increasingly popular until now and their business already has six employees, of course all the requirements to build a business have been completed. They also have plans to open a branch but not soon, because they now want to focus on taking care of Dana's mother-in-law first and enjoy the process that they are building or going through now.

## **ADI**

Adi began to recognize the business when he was 10<sup>th</sup> years old, Adi's parents are farmers. When Adi was in elementary school he only focused on school and playing with his friends and helping his parents occasionally, the beginning of his interest in entrepreneurship because he often bought and saw people selling in the canteen he was in school during elementary school "around the age of 9<sup>th</sup> years", then he began to ask people who sell in the canteen because he was curious, why they want to sell. It turned out that the people in Adi's canteen during elementary school chose to sell because they had no other choice, then some were given an offer by the school to sell, and some because their children attended the elementary school. Adi then asked again if that was all *"ask the people who sells at his school"*. There was more, but the people who sold at Adi's school did not answer his question. But since then, Adi has been curious and wondering why these people want to sell. Not only that, but Adi also began to ask his father, "Sir, why do people want to sell in my school canteen, because they like to sell and earn money, Adi," the father replied. From this point on, the entrepreneurial spirit emerged to increase his pocket money," Adi said.

At around the age of 10<sup>th</sup>, Adi started selling, but in secret because he was embarrassed if anyone found out. *"Initially I started to be interested in selling when I was*

10<sup>th</sup> years old, at that time I started selling rubber bands and paper puppets but secretly, so I sold using the door-to-door method. But suddenly everyone knew that I was selling and how surprised I was that they always asked me if there was a new game that was trending in my school or area." Adi began to feel happy and more confident, because he got extra pocket money from here. "As a result, I was very happy and more motivated even though I didn't get much money at that time, but I began to understand how happy it is when our sales sell."

Year after year Adi continued to do this, and he began to wonder how he could earn more money. "It was when I was in high school that I started to think about how I could earn more money. It so happened that at that time there was a seminar with the theme of how to become a successful entrepreneur, so I became more enthusiastic and challenged so I joined the seminar. In the seminar, they taught me how to build a business. From the resource person, I got the conclusion that to build a business from scratch, it does require costs, but there are several things that I must prepare besides the costs, such as communication skills, cooperation, how to manage finances, how to market products and how to read opportunities." The seminar made Adi more interested in becoming an entrepreneur, although money was still a problem for Adi but with persistence Adi began to commit to saving or saving and still running his old business. "Since I participated in the seminar, I have become more enthusiastic and dreamed that someday I could have my own business, even though capital is a problem, but I think there must be a way to achieve it someday".

Around the age of 18<sup>th</sup>, Adi started looking for friends to work with to build the business he dreamed of. But at that time Adi didn't know what specific business he wanted to build. "After graduating from high school, I started looking for some friends while completing the documents to enter college. I realized that to build a business, I had to have good relationships or connections between people to make it easier for me to achieve my goals." It so happened that Adi was studying at one of the campuses in the Special Region of Yogyakarta in the Faculty of Economics. During his studies Adi began to meet several lecturers and friends in his department. From here Adi became more motivated and enthusiastic about wanting to quickly have his own business, the more he studied and discussed with his friends he began to get ideas to build a business in the culinary field, "because Yogyakarta has quite promising opportunities for culinary businesses (said Adi)". Since then, Adi began to study and design what needed to be prepared, even though he had



studied and discussed with his friends on campus and outside campus, he felt that he still had to learn a lot more so that the business he built would be better and develop. *"I always try to be humble and always ask people, is this concept correct? Is it right if it's like this? Because I believe that if I often discuss them then I will get more insight". After graduating from college, Adi already had his own business in the culinary field. "After graduating, I already had my own business in the culinary field and had one wife, it is true that my business is still not too big and developed, but all of this is the beginning or process towards success".*

## HIDAYAT

Hidayat is the second of three siblings. Hidayat's family background is entrepreneurs and civil servants. Hidayat's family business is to see market conditions, so that whatever can be sold will be made into a business by the Hidayat family. As a child, Hidayat lived in Banda Aceh Province. From elementary school to high school, Hidayat was interested in the business world because according to Hidayat, he likes to see people happy because of the products he sells. *"From elementary school to high school I lived in Banda Aceh Province. My family worked as civil servants and traders. From elementary school to high school, I often sold various products, one of which was selling soccer jerseys."* After graduating from high school, Hidayat continued his studies in the city of Yogyakarta. During Hidayat's time studying in the city of Yogyakarta, Hidayat learned many things, but he was very aware that learning on campus would be useless if he lacked socialization, so Hidayat tried to balance what Hidayat got during college and his social environment. *"Around 2013<sup>th</sup>, I continued my studies in Yogyakarta at the Faculty of Economics, majoring in Development. While studying, I also worked or was trusted to manage a business in the Condongcatur area (areas in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia). Why did I choose to study and work? Because my dream is to have my own business, and I think I should have experience first before building my own business. While I was trusted to manage the business, I often discussed with various groups."*

For years Hidayat continued to run the business entrusted to him, around 2018<sup>th</sup> he graduated from college, but he had not decided to return to his hometown. Coincidentally in 2020<sup>th</sup> Hidayat was accepted to work at the Citilink aircraft company, so Hidayat decided to quit his job and look for new challenges. *"In 2018<sup>th</sup> I graduated from college and continued the business entrusted to me. In February 2020<sup>th</sup>, I was accepted at Citilink*



*Indonesia to be assigned to Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA), so I decided to leave my old job and look for new challenges. However, in March 2020<sup>th</sup>, the Covid-19 virus spread to Indonesia, so there was no more news from Citilink. However, I was still waiting in the hope that there would be news from the company. For months I was still waiting in the city of Yogyakarta because at that time access to return to Banda Aceh was quite difficult, so I tried to stay in the city of Yogyakarta for a while and wait for further news related to many things, one of which was trying to find references to survive and waiting for news when the Covid-19 pandemic would end in Indonesia."*

For months, Hidayat waited for news about the continuation of Covid-19, he also tried to find a job and thought about several businesses that he wanted to build via the internet or social media, precisely in mid-2020<sup>th</sup> Hidayat decided to build a business in the clothing and culinary sector, but he decided to return home first to Banda Aceh. *"During the Covid-19 period in 2020<sup>th</sup>, I tried to look for job vacancies several times and thought about various forms of business ranging from clothes and culinary. To be precise, in August 2020<sup>th</sup> I decided to return to Banda Aceh and start building a business in the clothing sector. Initially, I wanted to try opening a business in the culinary sector first, but I felt that Covid-19 would last a long time in Indonesia, so I decided to build a business in the clothing sector first by marketing products on social media".* To be precise, in 2021<sup>st</sup> Hidayat dared to jump his business into the clothing sector with quite mature considerations. Hidayat had prepared everything, starting with finding work partners, and production for clothes and employees. *"After arriving in Banda Aceh Province around August 2020<sup>th</sup>, I had many discussions with my family and friends in the Banda Aceh area. After I received a lot of input and learned from various perspectives, I decided in February 2021<sup>st</sup> to launch my business with the business name "HANANAN". This business is engaged in the clothing sector with the concept of Acehnese culture, but I am not alone in designing and launching my business products. The product designs that I sell are the result of collaboration with Acehnese artists and are produced in East Java (Kediri, Indonesia). In addition, I also have a business to utilize young people and parents in the Aceh area which I call "HANANAN ART and HANANAN ACADEMY " so that the concept of my three businesses is the concept of Acehnese culture and is sustainable with the hope that this business will continue to survive and expand in the future. Now I have three employees, but these employees are specifically for HANANAN ACADEMY, while for*

*HANANAN CLOTHES and HANANAN ART I still manage them myself, but I have a work partner for design and production".*

Specifically, for Hananan Clothes, Hidayat sells its products throughout Indonesia with three delivery locations, while for Hananan Art and Hananan Academy, they are currently still in Banda Aceh Province. *"Especially for Hananan Clothes I have three delivery locations, one in my house in Banda Aceh Province and two in Java Island, precisely in the cities of Jakarta and Yogyakarta. Hananan Clothes products have been sold from Sumatra to Papua, while for Hananan Art and Hananan Academy for now only in Banda Aceh Province, not only that I am also currently pioneering a culinary business with the concept of typical Aceh Province food, this culinary business was established in December 2022<sup>nd</sup> which is located in Banda Aceh, but this business is a home business that is not as big as my previous three businesses. I built this culinary business with my mother and father, but the priority of the business that I run is focused on my three previous businesses, namely Hananan Clothes, Art & Academy".* In other words, Hidayat is slowly pioneering the business he built and with the aim of expanding other businesses that he wants to develop. Hidayat hopes that with the spirit he has, he can open new jobs and become a successful entrepreneur.

Based on several statements from entrepreneurs, we can obtain several important things for becoming an entrepreneur or building a business in the culinary field, which will be described in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1.** Soft Skill Analysis Results Based on Experience from Culinary Entrepreneurs

Based on the narrative above, it can be said that there are several things that researchers have found, including self and social skills are very important aspects for building a business. These skills have various sub-aspects, including creative, innovative,

motivation or desire, decision making including problem solving, discipline, honest, diligent, persistent, cooperative, adaptive, communicative, friendly. If studied further, these sub-aspects are included in the soft skill category. These soft skills can be obtained in various ways, one of which is by studying. Studying is not only done at school but can be obtained from anywhere, and can be done by placing more emphasis on a sense of responsibility, commitment, daring to take risks, and being action-oriented, which can contribute significantly to increasing soft skills in entrepreneurship (Diandra, 2019). Then how can you master these soft skills? One way is to get out of your comfort zone (Ariyanto et al., 2021), for example, we are comfortable learning to cook at home, but try to learn to cook outside the home once in a while so that we get new views or insights to support these soft skills.

Competence is indeed very important to become an entrepreneur, one of those competencies is soft skills. Soft skills are very much needed in entrepreneurship such as responsibility, social spirit, self-management, integrity, honesty, interpersonal skills, creative skill, strategic, and digital competencies (Masitoh et al., 2022; Purwanti et al., 2024). Other findings reveal that soft skills are non-technical abilities that are very much needed in work, including: motivation and habit daily, social skills, work ethic, leadership in organizations, creativity in work, having good ambition, a high sense of responsibility (ethics/obeying rules), and having the ability to communicate to develop their work so that it is easier to achieve and be successful in work (Pebrianto & Puspitowati, 2022; Prihatin et al., 2016; Škare et al., 2022; Widari et al., 2024). Self-confidence, positive attitude and courage to take risks (da Costa et al., 2023), besides that experience also contributes to developing and improving soft skills in entrepreneurship (Ruiz, 2022). There are several findings that state that in order to be relevant to the current situation, it is better to prioritize lessons or training related to digital (Garcez et al., 2022). Or using various methods, one of which is the intensive soft skills training method, this method can improve short-term business results (Ubfal et al., 2022), then the findings (Fernandez Rivas & Husein, 2022) mentions there are three methods for innovative and entrepreneurial training, including knowledge, persuasion, and empathy, this framework enriches long-term skills that need to be taught during the education process, and professional practice. These methods can be used as a reference for conducting soft skill-based education and training in the scope of culinary entrepreneurship.

## CONCLUSION

Exploring by narrating some experiences from culinary maestros, we found two major aspects that are very fundamental to becoming an entrepreneur, namely personal and social skills. From these two aspects, we generalize them to include communicative & friendly; motives or desires & decision-making including problem solving; perseverance & tenacity; discipline & honesty; cooperation & adaptability; creative & innovative. With these findings, it should be able to provide a big picture of Generation Z and even Alpha of how important these fundamental aspects are. By finding this big picture, it will provide good implications for the sons and daughters of the nation that becoming an entrepreneur is not only about material things and of course this will be better and more significant if given inclusive guidance, from educators for example. Exploring soft skills based on the experiences of culinary entrepreneurs by narrating them is one of the advantages of this research. Quite different from the research of Almeida & Devedzic (2022) which emphasizes several aspects exclusively with soft skills based on the EntreComp Framework (EC) in 2016th. Another study, from Tem et al (2020) emphasizes more on the development of entrepreneurial soft skills based on communication skills, critical thinking, and problem solving. In addition to these differences, another advantage of this study is that readers can implicitly interpret or find other soft skills besides those that researchers interpret (find). This research is indeed more emphasized on soft skills in the culinary field based on its master's by narrating their experiences, the hope for further research may be able to explore further other aspects and even other vocational fields. Because in addition to having an impact on culinary students or graduates, the important aspects found in this study also implicitly have an impact on other vocational fields or the scope of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

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