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Determinants of Work Readiness Among Vocational High School Students: An Analysis of Career Motivation and Industrial Work Practice Experience

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Abstract: The objective of the study is to evaluate the impact of career motivation and industrial work practice experience (Prakerin) on students' work readiness at SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang. The study utilized a quantitative approach, utilizing questionnaire data collected from 60 students who had successfully completed Prakerin. The results showed that career motivation had a positive and significant effect on work readiness, contributing 42.6% with a correlation coefficient of 0.653. Meanwhile, industrial work practice experience had a stronger influence, contributing 55.8% with a correlation coefficient of 0.747. Both variables concurrently accounted for 61.6% of the variance in work preparedness, whilst the remaining 38.4% was affected by factors external to the research model. The findings indicate that experience in industrial work practices is more influential than career motivation in determining the work preparedness of vocational students. This indicates that authentic industrial exposure plays a more critical role in developing students' technical competence, adaptability, discipline, and professional attitudes than motivational orientation alone. Therefore, strengthening the quality of Prakerin through structured mentoring, competency-based learning, and stronger school-industry collaboration is essential for producing more adaptive, competitive, and job-ready vocational graduates.

Keywords: Career Motivation, Industrial Work Practice Experience (Prakerin), Work Readiness, Technical Skills, Non-Technical Skills.

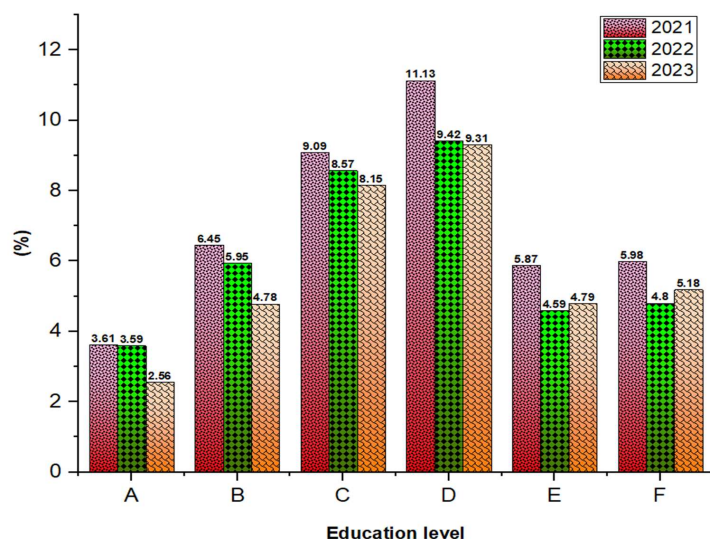
INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's Open Unemployment Rate (Tingkat Pengangguran Terbuka/TPT) by educational attainment is an important indicator for assessing the alignment between

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educational outputs and labor market demands. Variations in TPT across educational levels indicate that formal education does not always correspond proportionally to employment opportunities, thereby suggesting the existence of competency mismatches and differences in labor absorption capacity. Findings related to skills mismatch in vocational education further reveal that strengthening the linkage between curriculum design, competency standards, and industry requirements remains a major challenge in preparing work-ready graduates.



Education level : A= No/Never Attended School/Not Yet Graduated & Primary School Graduate), B =Junior High School (SMP), C= General Senior High School (SMA), D= Vocational Senior High School (SMK), E =Diploma I/II/III, F= University

Figure 1. Open Unemployment Data for Vocational High Schools (SMK) in Indonesia, 2021-2023 (Source: BPS, processed in 2025)

Based on figure 1 about Indonesia's Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) data for 2021–2023, graduates of Vocational High Schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK) consistently recorded higher unemployment rates compared to other educational levels. In 2023, SMK graduates still exhibited the highest unemployment rate at 9.31%, exceeding those of general senior high school, diploma, and university graduates. This condition is particularly important to examine because vocational education is normatively designed to produce work-ready graduates, as mandated by Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, particularly Article 15, which stipulates that vocational education prepares students to work in specific occupational fields. However, previous studies indicate that vocational graduates continue to face a gap between the competencies they possess and the demands of industry, resulting in suboptimal labor market absorption.

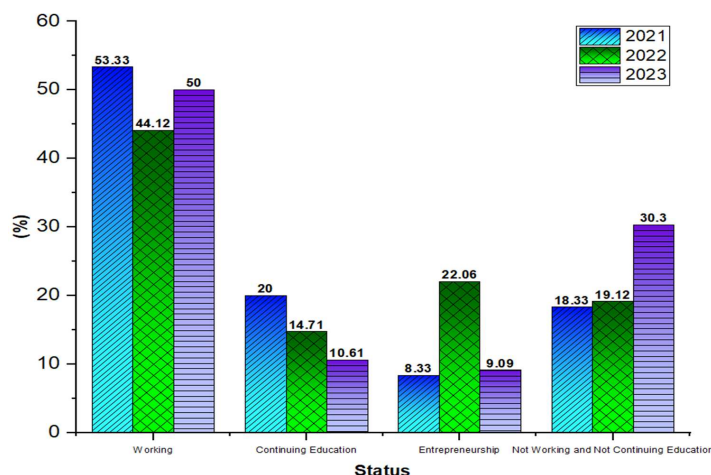


Figure 2. Post-Graduation Activities of SMK Perkasa 1 Students
(Source: Tracer Study Data from SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang)

Meanwhile, the tracer study results of SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang based on figure 2, indicate that the majority of graduates have been absorbed into the labor market, although the proportion fluctuated over the last three years, reaching 53.33% in 2021, declining to 44.12% in 2022, and increasing again to 50.00% in 2023. In contrast, the proportion of graduates pursuing higher education showed a consistent decline, from 20.00% in 2021 to 10.61% in 2023. Entrepreneurial pathways also demonstrated fluctuations, accounting for 8.33% in 2021, rising to 22.06% in 2022, and decreasing again to 9.09% in 2023. On the other hand, the proportion of graduates who were neither employed nor continuing their education increased significantly, from 18.33% in 2021 to 30.30% in 2023. These findings suggest that although SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang has contributed to preparing graduates for employment, a considerable proportion of graduates have not yet transitioned optimally into the workforce or further education. Therefore, this issue warrants further attention in relation to work readiness, competency relevance, and the effectiveness of vocational education.

Theoretically, this issue can be explained through the concepts of work readiness and vocational competence, which emphasize that work readiness is not solely determined by the mastery of technical skills, but also by adaptability, communication, collaboration, problem-solving abilities, and readiness to face technological changes (Azzahra et al., 2025). Previous studies have shown that industrial work practice and mastery of hard skills positively influence the work readiness of vocational high school students, while technological adaptability has emerged as the most critical component of vocational graduates' work readiness. Therefore, the persistently high unemployment rate among SMK graduates indicates that the development of comprehensive work readiness still requires significant strengthening.

Although previous studies have examined unemployment among SMK graduates, skills mismatch, work readiness, and tracer studies, most have focused on a single dimension, such as the influence of industrial internships, hard skills, or mismatch analysis within specific graduate groups (Amira et al., 2022). Furthermore, these studies generally have not integrated analyses of the Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) by educational attainment with school-level tracer study evidence within a unified conceptual framework grounded in work readiness and vocational competence theories. Consequently, there remains a research gap regarding how

macro- and micro-level data can be integrated to provide a more comprehensive explanation of unemployment among vocational high school graduates.

The novelty of this study lies in the integration of two levels of analysis: the macro level through Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) data by educational attainment, and the micro level through a tracer study of graduates from SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang. This study also situates the issue of unemployment among SMK graduates within the theoretical frameworks of work readiness and vocational competence, thereby contributing not only descriptively but also conceptually. Furthermore, this research provides empirical evidence from a specific school context that has received limited scholarly attention, thereby enriching the literature on the transition of vocational high school graduates into the labor market in Indonesia (Verma Prikshat, 2019).

Based on the foregoing background, this study aims to analyze the relationship between the high Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) among SMK graduates and their work readiness and vocational competence, as well as to explain the tracer study results of graduates from SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang as empirical evidence at the school level. More specifically, this study seeks to identify the factors influencing graduates' transition into the labor market, assess the relevance of competencies acquired during vocational education, and formulate implications for strengthening vocational education in order to achieve greater alignment with labor market demands.

METHOD

This research utilized a quantitative descriptive design with multiple linear regression to analyze the impact of motivation and Industrial Work Practice (Prakerin) experience on students' work preparedness. The primary data were collected by distributing structured questionnaires to 60 students of grade XII of SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang who have completed Prakerin. The study employed a census method using non-probability sampling as all eligible pupils were included. The study used a census method with a non-probability sampling design suitable for a relatively small and well-defined accessible population, as it involved all eligible students (Aflah et al., 2025).

The questionnaire is based on the theory of motivation, Prakerin experience, and work readiness indicators, and measured by a Likert-type scale (Likert, Rensis, 1932). As is customary in quantitative scale development, the instrument was subjected to tests of validity and reliability prior to analysis to ensure accuracy and internal consistency of measurements. (DeVellis, 2017). The data analysis involved descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression. In addition to the classical assumption tests for normality, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, and linearity were performed to confirm the suitability of the regression model.

The sample size was adequate as the sample covered the whole population of eligible Grade XII students in the school.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

All statement items met the validity criterion, with item-total correlation coefficients of at least 0.30, while all variables had Cronbach's alpha values above 0.80, indicating strong internal consistency and confirming that the instruments were suitable for further analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis Results

Commented [MMI1]: It is recommended to:
Clarify measurement procedures
Provide stronger justification for sample adequacy
Improve reporting consistency in statistical analysis

Variable	Number of Indicators	Total Score (%)	Average (%)	Criteria
Career Motivation (X1)	6	430	71.67	Good
Industrial Work Practice Experience (X2)	6	413	68.83	Good (borderline adequate)
Work Readiness (Y)	8	569	71.13	Good

Data reprocessed by the researcher, 2026.

Descriptively in tabel 1, career motivation (X1) and work readiness (Y) were categorized as good, with average percentages of 71.67% and 71.13%, respectively. Meanwhile, industrial work practice experience (X2) was also categorized as good, but obtained the lowest score at 68.83%. This finding indicates that industrial work practice (Prakerin) remains the weakest aspect in improving vocational students' work readiness.

Field findings based on interviews with Prakerin supervising teachers and students who had completed industrial work practice revealed that students' roles during Prakerin were still limited. Students were often positioned merely as supporting labor rather than being actively involved in core industrial tasks. In addition, the lack of intensive supervision and mentoring from industry partners resulted in students gaining less optimal practical experience. This condition was also recognized by SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang as a challenge in improving the quality of Prakerin implementation to better support students' work readiness.

Table 2. Results of the Effect of Career Motivation on Students' Work Readiness (Y) at SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang

Model		Coefficients ^a		t	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	31.782	7.043		4.513 .000
	Motivasi Memasuki Dunia Kerja	.849	.129	.653	6.566 .000

a. Dependent Variable: Work Readiness (Y)

Source: SPSS version 20.0 output, data processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on tabel 2, the regression equation for the influence of career motivation on students' job readiness at SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang is $Y = 31.782 + 0.849X_1$. This equation indicates that for a unit increase in career motivation (X1), students' job preparedness (Y) will increase by 0.849 units. The base level of job readiness is fixed at 31.782, assuming career motivation to be null or constant. The regression equation that describes the effect of career motivation on work readiness in students of SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang is $Y = 31,782 + 0.849X_1$. The equation shows that if career motivation (X1) increases by 1 unit, pupils' job preparedness (Y) will increase by 0.849 units. The constant of 31.782 is the baseline level of job readiness, given a constant or zero level of career motivation.

Table 3. Results of the Coefficient of Determination Between Motivation to Enter the Workforce and Work Readiness

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.653 ^a	.426	.417	9.41194

a. Predictors: (Constant), Career Motivation (X1)

Source: SPSS version 20.0 output, data processed by the researcher (2026).

Partial regression analysis indicated that career motivation had a positive and statistically significant effect on work preparedness ($t=6.566$; $p<0.001$) in table 3, with a correlation coefficient of 0.653 and a coefficient of determination of 42.6%. This suggests that professional drive is important but has a limited contribution and cannot fully account for job preparedness. Motivation is important, but it cannot be the only main factor to decide the task readiness.

Table 4. The Results of the Effect of Industrial Work Practice Experience on Students' Work Readiness at SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang.

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	36.025	4.948		7.280	.000
	Pengalaman Praktik Kerja Industri	.658	.077	.747	8.549	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Work Readiness (Y)

Source: SPSS version 20.0 output, data processed by the researcher (2026).

The regression equation in the results of the effect of industrial work practice experience on students' work readiness at SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang is $Y = 36,025 + 0,658X_2$ based on tabel 4. This equation indicates that every increase in industrial work practice experience (X_2) contributes positively to students' work readiness (Y). The findings suggest that direct exposure to real workplace conditions plays an important role in shaping students' practical skills, adaptability, and professional attitudes. Therefore, work readiness in vocational education is strengthened more effectively through authentic industrial experience rather than motivation alone.

Table 5. Results of the Coefficient of Determination Between Industrial Work Practice Experience and Work Readiness

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.747 ^a	.558	.550	8.26609

a. Predictors: (Constant), Prakerin X2

Source: SPSS version 20.0 output, data processed by the researcher (2026).

Based on tabel 5, industrial work practice experience had a stronger effect on work readiness ($t=8.549$; $p<0.001$) with a correlation coefficient of 0.747 and a coefficient of determination of 55.8%. This indicates that more than half of the variation in work readiness

can be explained by Prakerin experience. Substantively, this finding confirms that direct student involvement in the industrial environment has a greater impact than motivational drive alone. Thus, students' work readiness cannot be built only through internal motivation, but primarily through real-world experiences that connect learning with workplace demands.

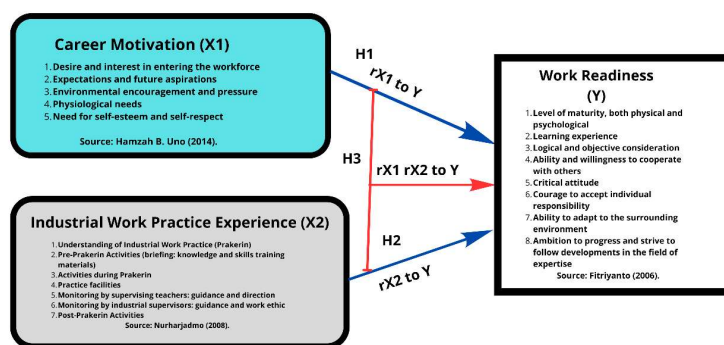
Table 6. Results of the Influence Test of Motivation to Enter the Workforce and Industrial Work Practice Experience on Students' Work Readiness at SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5517.646	2	2758.823	45.717	.000 ^b
	Residual	3439.688	57	60.345		
	Total	8957.333	59			

Source: SPSS version 20.0 output, data processed by the researcher (2026).

Based on tabel 6, Career Drive and Prakerin experience simultaneously have a significant effect on work readiness ($F=45.717$; $p<0.001$) with a coefficient of determination of 0.616. The two variables collectively account for 61.6% of the variance in work preparedness, whereas the remaining 38.4% is affected by extraneous factors, including familial support, the educational environment, and individual student characteristics.

In the regression equation $Y=a+0.401X_1+0.489X_2$, the coefficient for Prakerin is larger than that of career motivation, showing that Prakerin is the more dominant predictor (Based on figure 3). This is the main contribution of the study: industrial work practice experience is not only significant, but also more influential than career motivation in shaping vocational students' work readiness. These findings emphasize that vocational education effectiveness depends not only on strengthening students' motivation, but more importantly on providing meaningful industrial exposure and authentic workplace learning experiences. Therefore, improving the quality of Prakerin programs should become a strategic priority in preparing job-ready vocational graduates.



Source: Research Results

Figure 3. Conceptual Framework

Discussion

These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that motivation and practical experience significantly influence work readiness (Richard M. Ryan dan Edward L. Deci, 2000). However, this study extends earlier findings by showing that work readiness in vocational education is more strongly shaped by authentic industry exposure than by motivational orientation alone. Although motivation to enter the world of work provides a positive contribution to work readiness, work-practice experience (Prakerin) appears to have a more dominant effect, as indicated by higher regression and coefficient of determination values.

The results support existing international literature, which demonstrates that training, practical experience, and direct industry exposure are closely associated with vocational graduates' work readiness (Arik Harianto et al., 2025). Thus, work readiness should not be viewed merely as the outcome of students' internal motivation, but also as the result of meaningful engagement in authentic industrial environments.

Field findings further reinforce this argument. Interviews with accompanying Prakerin teachers and students indicate that students' involvement during industrial practice remains relatively limited and is mostly focused on supportive tasks rather than core industrial activities. Consequently, the practical exposure and workplace learning opportunities obtained by students are not yet fully optimized.

When compared with various international studies on vocational education, the present findings highlight the importance of school-industry collaboration in preparing work-ready graduates (Ornellas et al., 2019). Direct exposure in the workplace enables students to develop technical competencies, adaptability, communication skills, and professional attitudes required by industry, especially within the framework of experiential learning and a balanced development of hard skills and soft skills. Therefore, the main contribution of this study lies in reaffirming that authentic industrial experience is the strongest factor shaping vocational students' work readiness.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that career motivation and industrial work practice experience significantly influence students' work readiness at SMK Perkasa 1 Sumedang, both partially and simultaneously. However, industrial work practice experience (Prakerin) was found to be more dominant than career motivation in shaping work readiness. This finding highlights the main theoretical contribution of the study: vocational students' work readiness is formed more strongly through authentic industrial exposure than through motivational orientation alone.

The study confirms that direct involvement in real workplace environments strengthens students' technical competence, adaptability, discipline, and professional attitudes. Therefore, improving the quality of Prakerin through stronger school-industry collaboration, structured mentoring, and competency-based learning is essential for producing more adaptive, competitive, and job-ready vocational graduates.

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