International Journal of Pedagogy and Education Research
IJPER

International Journal of Pedagogy and Education Research

How Field Practice Influencing the Work Readiness: A Case Study at SMK Negeri 4 Pekanbaru

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Received: ; Revised:; Accepted:

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine the suitability of the implementation of WORK PRACTICE as seen from the following variables: first, context variables; second, input variables; third, process variables; fourth, product variables; fifth, output variables. This type of research is a program evaluation with a quantitative descriptive approach. The population of this study were 35 students of class XII of the Construction and Property Business Expertise Program in the 2023/2024 school year, 4 supervising teachers/productive teachers (including the head of the expertise program), 9 DU/DI instructors, and 48 vice principals of the community relations section. The sampling technique used was Nonprobability Sampling. The research instrument was a questionnaire. Data collection was done by questionnaire, observation, and interview methods. Based on the results of research and discussion, several conclusions can be drawn. It shows that the WORK PRACTICE program has achieved its objectives well, with cooperation between schools and DU/DI in accordance with the MoU. Students show readiness to take part in Work Practices, by being supervised continuously by the supervising teacher so as to improve competence, and are ready to work after completing Work Practices.

Key Words: Program Evaluation; Field Work Practices; Competence of Vocational Students; Industry Partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a central role in driving the progress of society and the nation. As a driver of development, Syahdan & Ali (2022) define that education not only provides knowledge and skills, but also shapes the character of individuals who are resilient, creative and innovative. Its role is significant in reducing poverty, as education opens access to better employment opportunities and improves people's standard of living. Through the provision of life skills, education empowers individuals to face the challenges and changes of the times, while preparing them to contribute to economic, social and cultural development. In the long run, investments in education not only produce a productive workforce but also strengthen social cohesion and promote progress in various sectors of life.

***Corresponding author**
IJPER (International Journal of Pedagogy and Education Research), x (x), xxxx, xx-xx
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX, E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | DOI: http://doi.org/xx.xxxxx/ijper.vxix.xxxx

At the same time, education in Indonesia is geared towards creating competent human resources, and Vocational High Schools (SMK) are one of the main instruments to achieve this goal (Romadin et al., 2022). SMKs are established with the main objective of preparing students to become skilled laborers according to the needs of the labor market. As mentioned by Erwin et al., (2022), SMK curricula are specifically designed based on industry needs analysis, so that graduates are able to fill strategic positions in various fields of work. For example, students in automotive engineering SMKs will be trained to use the latest tools and technology, while students in business and management SMKs will be equipped with communication skills, financial management, and marketing strategies (Saengchai & Jermsittiparsert, 2019).

In addition, SMKs have a role in bridging the gap between the world of education and the world of work (Daulai, 2021). Their learning process emphasizes hands-on practice and real-world experience, such as internships in companies or community-based projects. This not only equips students with technical skills but also with soft skills such as teamwork, problem solving, and leadership. Thus, Lamb & Arisandy (2020) and Yıldırım & Gedik Bal, (2023) state that SMK graduates are not only ready to work but also able to adapt to global changes and challenges.

In the regulatory framework, Depdiknas (2003) confirm that the Law No. 20/2003 Article 15 emphasizes that vocational education, including SMK, is designed to prepare students to work in certain fields. This statement emphasizes the importance of the relevance of education to the needs of the world of work. Therefore, the government continues to improve the quality of SMKs through various programs, such as strengthening partnerships with industry, improving teacher competence, and developing modern learning facilities.

However, challenges still exist. Bast (2021) & Ramadhani et al., (2023) concluded that among them are the gap between the quality of SMK graduates in urban and rural areas, the lack of access to the latest facilities and technology, and the lack of understanding of the importance of vocational education in the community. For this reason, innovative strategies are needed, such as digitalization of learning, industry needs-based training programs, and student empowerment through entrepreneurship. With these steps, vocational schools will not only be a producer of skilled labor, but also a driving force of development that can bring Indonesia to the golden era in the 21st century (Sujarwo, 2021).

Work Practice is not only a bridge between education in SMK and the business world or industrial world (DU/DI), but also an important element in preparing students to be ready to face global challenges (Pourdavood & Yan, 2020). Through Work Practice, students not only learn about the theories they have acquired in class, but also integrate them with hands-on experience in the field. As proposed by Aprilia et al., (2024), this creates contextualized learning, where students can apply knowledge in real situations, improve their skills, and develop professional attitudes such as responsibility, discipline, and cooperation skills.

Furthermore, according to Rembang & Purwastuti (2020), the concept of "on-the-job training" applied in Work Practice provides its own advantages, namely providing direct experience in a real work environment. This not only improves students' technical skills, but also soft skills such as interpersonal communication, time management, and problem solving. Meanwhile, Widiyanti (2024) emphasizes that systematically designed Work Practice is a combination of formal education at school with practical training in industry, making it a balanced learning model between theory and practice.

In its implementation, Work Practice also helps students build a professional network that can be beneficial in the future (Jordan & Weller, 2017). The relationships built during Work Practice with professionals in the industry open up opportunities for students to get

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P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX, E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | DOI: http://doi.org/xx.xxxxx/ijper.vxix.xxxx

mentorship, work references, or even direct employment opportunities after completing their education. Thus, Work Practice not only aims to improve students' competencies, but also becomes a strategic step in preparing them to enter the workforce more confidently and competitively.

Program evaluation as defined by Pratomo & Shofwan (2022), is a systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and using information to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance of a program to its stated objectives. In the context of the Work Practice Program, evaluation is a crucial step to determine the extent to which this program has succeeded in achieving its main objectives, namely providing real work experience for students and preparing them to enter the world of work. Evaluation also aims to identify success factors, obstacles faced, and potential improvements that can be made to make the implementation of Work Practice more effective.

Furthermore, the program evaluation allows the school to evaluate the curriculum and teaching approaches used, so that they can be adapted to the changing needs of the industry. Information from the evaluation can be used by the school, teachers, and industry partners to align program implementation with the needs of a dynamic labor market and support the holistic development of student skills. In addition, the evaluation can be the basis for building closer partnerships between schools and industries, creating opportunities for collaboration in training program updates, and ensuring students have relevant practical skills for their future careers. Thus, the results of this evaluation can also be used to set new, more specific and adaptive indicators of success, strengthening the link between theory in the classroom and practice in the world of work.

METHODS

In this study, the type of evaluation research used is program evaluation with a qualitative descriptive approach. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), qualitative descriptive research is research that uses qualitative methods and descriptive analysis techniques to understand the meaning of data academically. The program evaluation research conducted by researchers aims to describe the suitability of the implementation of Work Practices as seen from the context, input, process, product, and output variables at SMK Negeri 4 Pekanbaru, Riau Province. This evaluation was conducted by looking at various main dimensions, namely context, input, process, product, and output, to determine the extent to which the program objectives were achieved, assess the resources and support provided, explore the methods and strategies used in its implementation, and evaluate the results and impacts of the program.

Through this research, it is hoped that it can provide an overview of the effectiveness and areas for improvement in the fieldwork program, as well as contribute to the improvement of vocational education practices and outcomes. In addition, this evaluation framework also helps to identify factors that influence the success of the program implementation, providing useful recommendations for future improvements.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings section in the research presents the results of data analysis objectively and in detail, without any in-depth interpretations or conclusions. The findings paragraph must be organized clearly, systematically, and use straightforward and factual language. Each finding presented needs to be given an explanation based on the results of data processing,

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such as numbers, percentages, or emerging patterns. It is crucial to present the findings in a structured manner, starting from the main findings to relevant supporting findings. Avoid adding personal opinions or excessive interpretations and each finding should also refer to the instruments used in the research, such as tests, interviews, or observations. At the end of the paragraph, if required, provide an overview or highlights of the main results that will be further explained in the discussion.

Table 1 Title

Indicator (s)	Finding (s)	Students (%)	Supervising Teacher (%)	Supervising DU/DI (%)
Improving Students' Work Readiness	Work Practice improves students' readiness to work.	80%	75%	70%
Competency & Soft Skills Development	Work Practice develops technical competencies and soft skills (discipline, responsibility, creativity).	85%	80%	78%
Role of Mentors & DU / DI	Mentors from DU / DI have an important role in the success of Work Practice.	90%	85%	80%
Contribution to Vocational Education Evaluation Theory applied.	Work Practice contributes to the evaluation of vocational education programs, especially in relation to the theory applied.	80%	70%	75%
Development of Work Practice Evaluation Model	It can be used to develop a more comprehensive Work Practice evaluation model.	70%	75%	80%
Work Practice Provision & Monitoring	Policy The need for a more structured policy formulation related to student preparation and monitoring during Work Practice.	65%	70%	60%
Competency Improvement & Mastery	Work Practice contributes to the improvement and mastery of student competencies although there are some obstacles in its achievement.	75%	80%	70%

The findings of this study indicate that the Work Practice program at SMK Negeri 4 Pekanbaru has a positive impact on students' work readiness and their competency development. The majority of students feel more prepared for work after taking part in the Work Practice, and they also experience improvements in technical competencies and soft skills such as discipline, responsibility, and creativity. The role of mentors and supervisors from DU/DI is crucial in ensuring the success of the Work Practice, with most respondents suggesting the need for further training for them. In addition, policies related to student preparation and monitoring during Work Practice need to be improved to be more structured and effective. Evaluation of the Work Practice program also points to the importance of developing a more comprehensive evaluation model to measure outcomes and provide useful feedback for future program improvements.

Discussion

From the findings, it can be concluded that developing students' work readiness through the Work Practice is one of the crucial aspects in equipping students to be ready to enter the world of work. Findings from various studies by Rembang & Purwastuti (2020); Widiyanti (2024) & Wong (2023) show that Work Practice has a significant impact on

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improving students' work readiness, with many students reporting that they feel better prepared and more confident after completing the program. However, despite the benefits of Work Practice, there are many aspects that can be improved and strengthened to further maximize students' work readiness. One of these is an extension of the internship duration or an increase in the time students spend in the field, allowing students to go deeper into their work and gain a more well-rounded experience (Martin et al., 2013).

In addition, it is important to improve and update the curriculum to be more integrated with the evolving needs and demands of the industry (Bastian et al., 2023). Wong (2023) concludes that closer collaboration between education and business/industry (DU/DI) in designing a more relevant and up-to-date curriculum will greatly assist students in understanding what skills are most needed by industry. Therefore, there needs to be a more systematic policy in preparing students before joining the Work Practice, including technical skills training in accordance with industry standards (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024). This training program could include practical and technical skills that are specific to the intended field of work, as well as training to hone communication and collaboration skills in a professional environment. More intense and structured communication between schools and DU/DI is also very important so that students get a clearer picture of industry expectations and the preparations that need to be made before they enter the world of work.

In addition to developing work readiness, Work Practice also contributes greatly to the development of students' technical competencies and soft skills (Widiyanti, 2024). Technical competencies acquired by students at school often focus on theory and basic concepts, but in practice, many students feel that the technical skills they learn at school do not fully match what is needed in the world of work. This creates a gap that needs to be addressed through improving the quality and relevance of the material taught in schools, as well as increasing industry involvement in the learning process (Roslin et al., 2019). However, in addition to technical competencies, Work Practice is also instrumental in developing soft skills, which include abilities such as discipline, responsibility, creativity, and teamwork. Hoa & Liou (2023) argue that these skills are very important in the world of work because in addition to technical ability, the ability to adapt, solve problems, and work together in teams are also key factors for professional success. While many students feel that their soft skills have improved after participating in the Work Practice, there are still many areas that need to be improved, especially in terms of effective communication, problem-solving skills, and adaptability to a dynamic work environment. For this reason, strengthening soft skills should be the main focus of the Work Practice program.

Markula & Aksela (2022) proposed that one effective way is to develop extracurricular activities or project-based training that can provide students with the opportunity to hone these skills in a more real and practical context. Project-based training or more intensive workplace simulations can also be effective platforms for honing communication and problem-solving skills, where students can learn directly from the experiences and challenges they face in the field. Thus, the combination of strengthening technical skills and soft skills integrated in the Work Practice program will better prepare students to face the demands of an increasingly complex and competitive world of work (Ghobakhloo & Fathi, 2020).

From the aspect of the role of supervisors in the field, both from the industry (DU / DI) and supervising teachers at school, greatly determines the success of Work Practice for students (Nur & Harun 2022). Mentors who have high technical competence and understanding of the industrial world can provide clear directions and constructive guidance, which is very important for the development of students' skills and knowledge.

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However, many findings show that the quality of this guidance is still not optimal, mainly due to the lack of structured training for mentors (Martin et al., 2013). Therefore, the development of a continuous training program for mentors, both in the industrial sector and in schools, is crucial. According to Bereczki & Kárpáti (2021) and Zhang & Ma (2023), this training should not only cover technical aspects related to the industry concerned, but also pedagogical skills, such as how to provide constructive feedback and approaches that suit the characteristics of students. This is so that mentors can more effectively help students overcome the challenges faced during the Work Practice, such as communication problems, adjustment to work culture, and management of complex tasks. In addition, to improve the effectiveness of mentorship, better communication between schools and industries should also be strengthened. This collaboration enables alignment between the curriculum taught at school and the needs and standards prevailing in the industry, so that students can gain a more relevant and applicable experience (Kuang et al., 2023; Susilawati, 2021). Thus, well-trained mentors and strong relationships between schools and industries will accelerate students' skill development and improve the overall quality of the Work Practice program.

However, Konu & Rimpelä (2002) and Zamiri & Esmaeili (2024) suggested that current evaluations of Work Practice programs generally focus on assessing the achievement of academic objectives or technical skills that have been targeted by the program. However, a more comprehensive evaluation model is needed to get a fuller picture of the Work Practice outcomes, as the factors that influence the success of the program are not only limited to student work outcomes. A more holistic evaluation should involve measuring students' psychosocial aspects, such as the development of communication skills, adaptability in the work environment, and understanding of the work culture in the industry (Rizvanović et al., 2023). In addition, it is also important to consider the achievement of long-term goals, namely how Work Practice can prepare students to enter the world of work with appropriate skills and attitudes.

For this reason, the provision and monitoring of Work Practice programs in educational institutions require more structured and comprehensive policies to ensure the optimal quality of learning experiences for students, while bridging the gap between the expectations of schools, industries, and students themselves (Che et al., 2021; Setyawan, 2022). An effective Work Practice experience depends not only on the placement of students in relevant companies or institutions, but also on thorough preparation and constant monitoring throughout the program. The importance of a structured policy lies in the need for a clear system of student orientation before the Work Practice begins. Matzembacher et al., (2019) suggest that this orientation should include the provision of skills that match the needs of the industry as well as an understanding of the work culture and norms that apply in the professional world. In addition, information regarding the industry field where students will be doing their Work Practice also needs to be clearly conveyed so that students have a precise picture of their duties and responsibilities.

This will help students to be better prepared and can reduce the possibility of a gap between the skills students have and those needed in the world of work. On the other hand, the industry also needs to be involved in the monitoring process by ensuring that there are adequate mentors or supervisors for each student (Nur & Harun, 2022). These mentors will provide the direction, guidance and support needed by the students in their Work Practice, as well as provide constructive evaluation of the students' skill development while in the field. Collaboration between schools and industries in this monitoring will create a space for both parties to assess the quality of the Work Practice and identify areas for improvement (Bereczki & Kárpáti, 2021).

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According to Nagel et al., (2024) & Ramdani et al., (2019), improving students' mastery of competencies in vocational education is essential to ensure that graduates have skills that match industry needs. Although there are indications of improved competencies through evaluations, the gap between the objectives of Work Practices and actual achievements suggests room for further improvement. This gap occurs due to several factors, one of which is the lack of proper alignment between what is taught in schools and the practical needs that exist in the industrial world (Leung & Cheng, 2019).

To understand the cause of this gap, it is important to examine how the skills taught during the learning process are applied in the context of the working world (Martínez-Venegas, 2022). Many students may master basic theories and concepts, but struggle to apply that knowledge in the more complex and dynamic situations that exist in the field. As discovered by Meşe & Sevilen (2021), this can be caused by various factors, such as a mismatch between the technology or tools used at school and those used in the industry, or students' lack of understanding of how to adapt their skills to the evolving needs of the industry.

As a solution, there needs to be a sharper and continuous evaluation of the extent to which the skills learned at school are truly relevant and effective in industrial practice (Romadin et al., 2022; Widiyanti, 2024). One effective way is to involve industry directly in vocational education curriculum development. Collaboration between schools and the industrial sector can ensure that the teaching materials provided are not only based on theory but also in accordance with the real conditions that exist in the industry. This also helps students to adapt more easily to the real work environment. Overall, to improve students' mastery of competencies in vocational education, a thorough evaluation of the skills acquired and how they are applied in the industrial world is required. Adaptive curriculum adjustments to industry changes, coupled with close collaboration between schools and the industrial sector, will contribute greatly to preparing students to face the world of work with relevant and applicable competencies.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

Based on the findings, developing students' work readiness through the Work Practice is an important element in preparing students to enter the world of work. This program has a positive impact on students' work readiness, with many students feeling more confident after participating in the program. Nonetheless, there is still room for improvement, such as extending the duration of the internship to allow students to gain more in-depth experience. In addition, the curriculum needs to be updated to be more relevant to industry needs, and there needs to be closer collaboration between education and industry. This can help ensure students learn the skills needed in the field. Technical skills training programs that are in line with industry standards, as well as improved mastery of soft skills such as communication and teamwork, should be the main focus of the Work Practice.

Mentors in the field, both from the industry and teachers, also play an important role in determining the success of the Work Practice. Therefore, continuous training for mentors is needed. In addition, a more holistic evaluation of Work Practice, which includes the psychosocial aspects of students, will provide a clearer picture of the success of this program. This evaluation could involve feedback from students, industry mentors and school supervising teachers. Structured policies and intensive monitoring during the Work Practice program are also crucial to ensure the quality of the student experience. Overall, to improve student competencies, closer collaboration between schools and industries, as well as curriculum adjustments that are responsive to industry developments, are needed to prepare students for the world of work with relevant and applicable skills.

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***Corresponding author**
IJPER (International Journal of Pedagogy and Education Research), x (x), xxxx, xx-xx
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX, E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | DOI: http://doi.org/xx.xxxxx/ijper.vxix.xxxx

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***Corresponding author**
IJPER (International Journal of Pedagogy and Education Research), x (x), xxxx, xx-xx
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX, E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | DOI: http://doi.org/xx.xxxxx/ijper.vxix.xxxx