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# The influence of internship experience, career guidance, and vocational interests on students' work readiness

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between industrial work practice experience, career guidance, and vocational interest and students' work readiness at SMK Negeri 1 Sutera. Work readiness was operationalized as a multidimensional construct including technical competence, work attitude, and adaptability. A quantitative correlational design was employed with a sample of 130 students selected using proportional random sampling. Data were collected through validated questionnaires adapted from previous studies, with acceptable validity ( $r > 0.30$ ) and reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.70$ ). Data were analyzed using multiple regression after meeting assumptions of normality, linearity, and multicollinearity. The results show that vocational interest has the strongest association with work readiness ( $\beta = 0.606, p < 0.001$ ), followed by industrial work practice ( $\beta = 0.418, p < 0.001$ ) and career guidance ( $\beta = 0.363, p < 0.01$ ). Simultaneously, the three variables explain 31.4% of the variance in work readiness. These findings suggest that both experiential learning and intrinsic motivation are important factors, although other variables beyond this model also contribute to students' work readiness.



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## Introduction

Vocational education plays a strategic role in preparing skilled human resources who are ready to enter the labor market (Putra et al., 2025; Sukmawati, 2022; Suroto et al., 2024). In practice, however, many vocational high school (SMK) graduates still face difficulties in transitioning into employment, particularly due to mismatches between acquired competencies and industry expectations. This issue has been widely reported in developing countries, where the alignment between training systems and labor market demands remains a persistent challenge (Alharethi et al., 2025; Prayogo et al., 2022). Therefore, strengthening students' work readiness is not only an educational goal but also a critical national concern.

Work readiness is not a single-dimensional outcome but a complex construct that integrates technical competence, cognitive understanding, behavioral adaptability, and psychological

preparedness (Malbuyo et al., 2024; Tan et al., 2023). Previous studies suggest that students' readiness for work is shaped by both internal and external factors. Internal aspects include motivation, career interest, and personal commitment, while external factors involve institutional support, learning environments, and exposure to real work settings (Maharani & Firmansyah, 2026; Putri & Wahyudin, 2024). Despite this broad understanding, there is still limited empirical research that systematically integrates these dimensions into a single explanatory model.

One of the most prominent external factors in vocational education is industrial work practice, commonly implemented through internships or workplace training programs. These programs provide students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts, develop problem-solving abilities, and adapt to workplace culture. Empirical studies consistently show that students who participate in structured and relevant internships tend to demonstrate better employability skills and smoother transitions into the workforce (Belmonte et al., 2025; Donald et al., 2024). However, the effectiveness of industrial practice often varies depending on program quality, supervision, and alignment with industry needs, which remains a critical issue in many vocational institutions.

In addition to experiential learning, career guidance is another important institutional factor that supports students' transition from school to work. Effective career guidance enables students to explore career pathways, understand their competencies, and make informed decisions about their future occupations. Research indicates that structured career counseling contributes to career maturity and decision-making self-efficacy (Aldawsari et al., 2025; Chan & Zhang, 2024; Kotey & T., 2024; Mokher & Mella-Alcazar, 2024). Nevertheless, in many vocational schools, career guidance services are still limited in scope and tend to focus on administrative tasks rather than comprehensive career development.

From the internal perspective, vocational interest plays a crucial role in shaping students' engagement and persistence in learning. Vocational interest reflects intrinsic motivation and personal alignment with a chosen field of study. Students who select vocational education based on genuine interest are more likely to participate actively in practical training and demonstrate stronger commitment to their career goals (Suharno et al., 2025; Zheng et al., 2025). However, although interest and motivation have been widely examined in general education, their specific contribution to work readiness in vocational contexts has not been sufficiently explored (Peter et al., 2025; Purohit et al., 2025; Suyatmo et al., 2025).

Despite the growing body of research on employability and vocational education, several important gaps remain. First, many studies tend to examine industrial work practice, career guidance, or student motivation separately, without considering their combined effects. Second, limited research has quantitatively analyzed the relative contribution of these variables within a single model, particularly at the vocational high school level. Third, previous studies rarely compare the strength of each predictor in explaining work readiness, especially in regional or non-urban vocational school settings (Annen et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024).

Recent developments in vocational education research emphasize the importance of adopting a more holistic perspective. Contemporary frameworks highlight that employability is shaped through the interaction between experiential learning, institutional support, and individual motivation. However, empirical studies testing this integrative perspective at the secondary vocational education level remain scarce. This indicates a need for research that not only examines individual variables but also evaluates how they operate collectively in shaping students' readiness for employment (Bérubé et al., 2025; Kholifah et al., 2025).

Based on these considerations, this study investigates the relationship between industrial work practice experience, career guidance, and vocational interest and students' work readiness. Using a quantitative correlational approach and regression analysis, this research aims to examine both partial and simultaneous relationships among these variables, as well as to identify the most dominant factor influencing work readiness (Orji & Herachwati, 2025; Qiu et al., 2024; Rahmawati et al., 2025; Syed et al., 2025). By doing so, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence that clarifies the relative importance of each determinant.

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The novelty of this study lies in its integrative analytical approach that combines experiential, institutional, and psychological dimensions within a single regression model at the vocational high school level. Unlike previous studies that focus on isolated predictors, this research offers a comparative analysis of the relative contribution of each variable. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of employability models in vocational education and provide practical insights for improving students' transition from school to work.

## Method

This study employed a quantitative approach using a correlational design to examine the relationship between industrial work practice experience, career guidance, vocational interest, and students' work readiness. The study was conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Sutera. The population consisted of all Grade XI and XII students enrolled in vocational programs at the school. A total of 130 students were selected as the sample using proportional random sampling to ensure adequate representation across study programs.

The study involved four variables: Industrial Work Practice ( $X_1$ ), Career Guidance ( $X_2$ ), Vocational Interest ( $X_3$ ), and Work Readiness ( $Y$ ). Work readiness was operationalized as a multidimensional construct consisting of technical competence, work attitude, and adaptability. Industrial work practice was defined as students' experiences during internships, including task involvement, supervision, and relevance to their field. Career guidance referred to structured school services that support career planning and decision-making. Vocational interest was defined as students' intrinsic motivation and personal preference toward their chosen field of study.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires adapted from previous validated instruments in vocational education research. Each variable was measured using Likert-scale items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument consisted of 32 items distributed across the four variables. Prior to data collection, a pilot test was conducted with 30 students outside the sample to evaluate instrument quality. Construct validity was assessed using product-moment correlation with a minimum threshold of  $r > 0.30$ , while reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha, with all variables exceeding the acceptable level of 0.70.

Data collection was conducted during regular school hours under the supervision of the researcher to minimize response bias. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed about the purpose of the study. To reduce common method bias, respondents were assured of anonymity and encouraged to answer honestly based on their actual experiences.

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data. Prior to hypothesis testing, classical assumption tests were conducted, including normality (Kolmogorov–Smirnov test), linearity (ANOVA test for deviation from linearity), and multicollinearity (Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor). In addition, heteroscedasticity was examined using scatterplot analysis of residuals.

Hypothesis testing was conducted using multiple regression analysis to examine the simultaneous relationship between independent variables and work readiness, while simple regression was used to explore partial relationships. The level of significance was set at 0.05. The strength of relationships was evaluated using correlation coefficients ( $R$ ), and the proportion of variance explained was assessed using the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ). Standardized beta coefficients were used to compare the relative strength of each predictor.

It should be noted that, due to the correlational design, the findings of this study indicate statistical relationships rather than causal effects. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution, and further research using experimental or longitudinal designs is recommended to confirm causal relationships.

## Results and Discussions

### Assumption Testing

Before testing the hypotheses, assumption testing was conducted, including normality, linearity, and multicollinearity tests. The results are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Summary of Assumption Testing

Test	Indicator	Value	Criterion	Conclusion
Normality (Kolmogorov–Smirnov)	Asymp. Sig.	0.200	> 0.05	Normally distributed
Linearity X1–Y	Deviation from Linearity	0.061	> 0.05	Linear
Linearity X2–Y	Deviation from Linearity	0.607	> 0.05	Linear
Linearity X3–Y	Deviation from Linearity	0.147	> 0.05	Linear
Multicollinearity (X1)	Tolerance / VIF	0.999/1.001	Tol > 0.10; VIF < 10	No multicollinearity
Multicollinearity (X2)	Tolerance / VIF	0.988/1.012	Tol > 0.10; VIF < 10	No multicollinearity
Multicollinearity (X3)	Tolerance / VIF	0.987/1.013	Tol > 0.10; VIF < 10	No multicollinearity

All statistical assumptions were satisfied. The residuals were normally distributed ( $p = 0.200 > 0.05$ ), all independent variables showed linear relationships with work readiness, and no multicollinearity was detected (VIF values close to 1). Therefore, regression analysis could be validly performed.

### Simple Regression Results

The effects of each independent variable on Work Readiness were tested using simple regression. The results are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Summary of Simple Regression Analysis

Independent Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$ (B)	t-value	Sig.	Contribution
Industrial Work Practice (X1)	0.418	0.275	0.272	2.473	0.000	27.5%
Career Guidance (X2)	0.363	0.267	0.200	3.873	0.003	26.7%
Vocational Interest (X3)	0.606	0.368	0.111	6.837	0.000	36.8%

All three variables significantly influence Work Readiness ( $p < 0.05$ ). Vocational Interest (X3) shows the strongest correlation ( $R = 0.606$ ) and the largest contribution (36.8%), indicating that students' intrinsic motivation plays the most dominant role in determining their readiness for employment. Industrial Work Practice contributes 27.5%, while Career Guidance contributes 26.7%, both indicating moderate positive effects.

### Multiple Regression and Simultaneous Effect

To examine the simultaneous contribution of all independent variables, multiple regression analysis was conducted.

**Table 3.** Summary of Multiple Regression Model

R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F-value	Sig.	Contribution
0.561	0.314	0.508	21.363	0.000	31.4%

The combined contribution of Industrial Work Practice, Career Guidance, and Vocational Interest to Work Readiness is 31.4%. The F-test result ( $F = 21.363$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) indicates that the regression model is statistically significant.

This means that the three predictors simultaneously explain a meaningful proportion of variance in students' work readiness, although 68.6% is influenced by other factors not examined in this study.

## Multiple Regression Coefficients

**Table 4.** Multiple Regression Coefficients

Variable	B	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	81.993	—	8.521	0.000
Industrial Work Practice (X <sub>1</sub> )	0.145	0.040	0.457	0.000
Career Guidance (X <sub>2</sub> )	0.193	0.157	1.783	0.000
Vocational Interest (X <sub>3</sub> )	0.283	0.055	0.627	0.003

The multiple regression equation ( $\hat{Y} = 81.993 + 0.145X_1 + 0.193X_2 + 0.283X_3$ ) indicates that Work Readiness increases proportionally with improvements in each predictor variable. Specifically, a one-unit increase in Industrial Work Practice ( $X_1$ ) is associated with an increase of 0.145 units in Work Readiness, a one-unit increase in Career Guidance ( $X_2$ ) corresponds to an increase of 0.193 units, and a one-unit increase in Vocational Interest ( $X_3$ ) leads to an increase of 0.283 units. Among the three predictors, Vocational Interest has the largest regression coefficient, demonstrating that it is the most dominant factor influencing students' Work Readiness in this study.

The findings of this study indicate that industrial work practice experience, career guidance, and vocational interest are significantly associated with students' work readiness. However, rather than interpreting these results as causal relationships, they should be understood as statistical associations within a correlational framework. The model explains 31.4% of the variance in work readiness, which suggests a moderate explanatory power in the context of social science research. This also implies that a substantial proportion of work readiness is influenced by other factors not included in the model (Gorman et al., 2025; Prasetya et al., 2025).

The significant relationship between industrial work practice and work readiness supports the experiential learning perspective, which emphasizes learning through real-world engagement. Students who are exposed to authentic workplace environments tend to develop not only technical competencies but also soft skills such as communication, discipline, and adaptability. However, the strength of this relationship may depend on the quality of the internship program, including supervision, relevance of tasks, and alignment with industry standards. Without these elements, the effectiveness of industrial practice may vary considerably across institutions (Asad & Anwar, 2025; Kriesi et al., 2024; Zuo et al., 2025).

Career guidance also demonstrates a meaningful relationship with work readiness, although its contribution is relatively lower compared to the other variables. This finding highlights the role of structured career support in helping students navigate their transition from school to work. From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with career development frameworks that emphasize the importance of career awareness, planning, and decision-making. Nevertheless, in many vocational schools, career guidance is still limited in scope and often focuses on administrative placement rather than comprehensive career development services (Hakiki et al., 2023; Supriyanto et al., 2022; Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2024).

Among the three predictors, vocational interest shows the strongest relationship with work readiness. This finding suggests that intrinsic motivation plays a central role in shaping students' engagement and persistence. From the perspective of motivational theories, students who have a strong personal interest in their field are more likely to invest effort in learning activities, complete internships more seriously, and develop a clearer sense of career direction. However, this result should be interpreted cautiously, as vocational interest may also overlap conceptually with other psychological factors such as self-efficacy and motivation, which were not included in this study (Fatni & Satrya, 2023; Khwarizmi, 2022; Ningsih & Ramadhani, 2025).

When examined simultaneously, the three variables form a complementary system in explaining work readiness. Industrial experience provides practical exposure, career guidance offers direction and planning, while vocational interest supplies intrinsic motivation. This integrated perspective is consistent with contemporary employability frameworks that emphasize the interaction between skills development, institutional support, and individual agency. Nevertheless, the study did not test

potential interaction or mediation effects among these variables, which may provide a deeper understanding of how they jointly influence work readiness (Fauzan et al., 2023; Nasution et al., 2024).

Despite these findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of self-reported questionnaires may introduce response bias and common method bias, as all variables were measured using the same instrument. Second, the study was conducted in a single vocational school, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Third, the correlational design does not allow for causal inference, and therefore the direction of relationships should be interpreted with caution.

The relatively moderate  $R^2$  value also indicates that other variables may play a more substantial role in shaping work readiness. Factors such as soft skills development, family socioeconomic background, school culture, teacher competence, and labor market conditions are likely to influence students' preparedness for employment. Future research should incorporate these variables and consider more complex analytical models, such as mediation or structural equation modeling, to capture the dynamics of work readiness more comprehensively (Nasution et al., 2024; Putri & Wahyudin, 2024).

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that improving students' work readiness requires a balanced and integrated approach. Schools need to strengthen the quality of industrial partnerships by ensuring relevant and well-supervised internships, develop structured and evidence-based career guidance programs, and foster students' intrinsic interest from the early stages of vocational education. By addressing both structural and psychological dimensions, vocational institutions can better prepare students to transition successfully into the workforce.

## Conclusions

This study concludes that industrial work practice experience, career guidance, and vocational interest are significantly associated with students' work readiness, with vocational interest showing the strongest relationship, while the overall model explains a moderate proportion of variance, indicating that both experiential and motivational factors are important but should be interpreted cautiously within a correlational framework.

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