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Understanding Vocational School Students' Work Readiness : The Synergistic Role of Fieldwork Practice and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the synergy between fieldwork practices and self-efficacy in improving the work readiness of vocational school students. This research used a survey method with a quantitative approach. This study involved 1289 populations and 306 samples from three state vocational schools in Surakarta, selected using a proportionate random sampling method. The instruments used in this study consisted of Fieldwork Practice (FWP), Self-efficacy (SE), and Work Readiness (WR) questionnaires. The data obtained were analyzed by statistical testing of descriptive analysis, correlation, and mediation using path analysis. The results of this study revealed that fieldwork practices and self-efficacy contribute significantly to students' work readiness. The analysis shows that self-efficacy serves as an important mediator in the relationship between fieldwork practices and work readiness, reinforcing the role of practice-based education in preparing students for the world of work. In this study, it was found that the development of education and training programs that focus on improving students' self-efficacy through fieldwork practices can be a major key in the school-to-work transition.

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Introduction

The transition from education to the world of work is a critical phase for vocational school students, underscoring the urgent need to improve work readiness. (Masdonati et al., 2021; Okolie, 2022). Work readiness prepares students to face immediate challenges in the world of work but also equips students with the resilience needed to meet the demands of an ever-evolving labor market (Inderanata & Sukardi, 2023). Work readiness is conceptualized as a condition where graduates are ready and likely to get a job (Kapareliotis et al., 2019) and as an essential attribute that needs to be improved (Tentama et al., 2019) because it is one of the criteria for measuring the suitability of graduates with the needs of the world of work (Sasmito, 2017; Lau et al., 2020). As the world's economies experience rapid technological advances and shifting industry needs, the ability of new graduates to adapt and thrive is crucial. This research emphasizes the importance of work readiness as an essential step to secure a sustainable future for vocational school graduates.

Despite the vocational school's central role in preparing a skilled workforce, some challenges hinder its effectiveness in ensuring the employability of its graduates. The main problem facing the world of work today is the perception and expectations of the world that vocational students should have the ability to work that is still very low, even non-existent (Prikshat et al., 2020; Lau et al., 2020; Inderanata & Sukardi, 2023). As many as 77% of employers have difficulty finding skilled employees (Manpower Group, 2023). The open unemployment rate shows vocational school graduates in Indonesia reaching 9.6%, the

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highest number compared to other levels of Education. This high unemployment rate is inseparable from the unpreparedness of student employment (Caballero & Walker, 2010).

Many vocational schools strive to align their curriculum with the dynamic needs of the industry, aiming to address the skills gap and improve graduates' employability (Nguyen et al., 2022), such as practice-based education models that combine school and business or industry (Ryan, 2001). Collaboration between school and industry represents a critical mass in the German education system as it forms the backbone of the dual training system (Ohlemann & Driesel-Lange, 2019). This system may not directly lead to better employment outcomes in Canada but supports skill acquisition over improved employment outcomes (Arney, 2022). Fieldwork practice is a platform that allows learners to integrate theoretical knowledge with the actual work environment and put the acquired knowledge into practice (Yusof & Mohiddin, 2018; Kapareliotis et al., 2019). Various studies prove that these programs are effective in improving learners' skills and readiness to face the world of work (Yusof & Mohiddin, 2018; Chukwuedo & Ementa, 2022; Okolie, 2022; Othman et al., 2022). However, there is often a gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, further complicating the transition from school to work (Nguyen et al., 2022). This research seeks to address this gap by examining the integration of fieldwork practice in vocational schools.

Implementing vocational training for learners is essential so that learners are prepared for the world of work (Othman et al., 2022). However, work readiness is only partially determined by training experience alone. Permana et al. (2023) showed that work readiness is strongly related to students' psychological conditions, especially self-confidence, also known as self-efficacy (Knight & Yorke, 2004). Self-efficacy plays a crucial role in preparing students for the world of work (Spanjaard et al., 2018; Magagula et al., 2020; Permana et al., 2023), as it links internal knowledge and social aspects of professional learning (Buenconsejo & Alfonso, 2020). Within the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) framework, fieldwork practice is a learning experience construct that impacts self-efficacy (Lent & Brown, 2019). Lent et al. (1994) highlighted the importance of real-life experiences in shaping career self-efficacy, which provides evidence of individuals' abilities and increases their confidence to succeed.

Previous research has extensively examined the factors that influence vocational students' work readiness, emphasizing the importance of practical skills (Kapareliotis et al., 2019; Prikshat et al., 2020; Mcgunagle & Zizka, 2020), practical learning (Kapareliotis et al., 2019; Okolie, 2022; Inderanata & Sukardi, 2023), and personal attributes (Lau et al., 2020; Magagula et al., 2020). Other studies show the positive influence of self-efficacy on career development and students' transition to the world of work (Permana et al., 2023). However, there still needs to be a gap in understanding how the combination of fieldwork practice and self-efficacy affects work readiness, especially among vocational students.

While there are many studies that provide an understanding of aspects of work readiness, often they are researched separately. This creates flaws in empirical studies exploring how fieldwork practices and self-efficacy simultaneously contribute to improving the employability readiness of vocational students. Especially, the specific context of vocational education in developing countries, such as Indonesia, whose implementation of vocational education still does not answer the challenges of the world of work (Suharno et al., 2020). The Findings of Tran & Soejatminah (2017); Nguyen et al. (2022), empirically explain the importance of integrating work practice learning and training in the vocational education curriculum. Then, (Lent & Brown, 2019) found that the individual factor they called self-efficacy plays an important role in the success of vocational education. Therefore, this study

proposes a holistic approach to understanding work readiness, arguing that it is not only the acquisition of technical skills but also the development of individuals to overcome challenges in the workplace (Permana et al., 2023). This is important because it is to recognize the factors that make up the student's work readiness, both from his learning experience and psychologically. This is very relevant because, because of his low self-efficacy, the student will be less likely to have a positive assessment of what he is doing (Buenconsejo & Alfonso, 2020).

Thus, this study aims to understand the synergy between fieldwork practices and self-efficacy in improving the work readiness of vocational school students. Specifically, it seeks to (1) assess the impact of fieldwork practice on students' self-efficacy beliefs, (2) the impact of fieldwork practice on students' work readiness, (3) examine how self-efficacy affects students' perceptions of their work readiness, and (4) identify the combined effects of fieldwork practice. And self-efficacy in the transition of students to the workforce. By achieving these goals, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of how vocational schools can be optimized to better prepare students for employment.

Research Method

This study follows the paradigm of positivism, as it examines cause and effect with a quantitative approach and utilizes survey methods (Rahi, 2017). A quantitative approach analyzes and tests hypotheses by correlating the influence between variables. The survey was conducted on twelfth-grade students who had conducted field-work practice programs in three public vocational schools in Surakarta. The selection of these three schools was based on having the same concentration, namely business and management. This concentration has universality and flexibility that allow cross-industry applications, adaptability to dynamic market changes, and relevance to digital transformation (Kotarba, 2018). These skills are also critical in leadership development and human resource management, supporting business scalability and enriching career growth prospects towards executive positions, as well as encouraging entrepreneurial spirit (Doz, 2020). It can be said that this field offers an interdisciplinary approach that combines various disciplines and prepares the workforce for the global economy. The population of this study amounted to 1,289 students. The sample size was determined through a proportionate random sampling technique with 306 students, as in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Number of sample proportion calculations

No	School	Sample Size	Number of Respondents
1	SVS 1 Surakarta	$\frac{306}{1.289} \times 346$	82
2	SVS 3 Surakarta	$\frac{306}{1.289} \times 415$	99
3	SVS 6 Surakarta	$\frac{306}{1.289} \times 528$	125
	Total		306

SVS = State Vocational School

Sampling was done using simple random sampling by giving equal opportunities to all populations to fill out questionnaires and randomly select. The survey is conducted as a closed questionnaire, filled in directly by the respondent by marking the answers as a rating scale. A Likert scale follows Sugiyono (2021), with five answer options used to group alternative responses (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). After data collection, descriptive statistical tests of mean, standard deviation,

frequency, and percentage of data are performed. Correlation between variables and mediation analysis is performed. Statistical analysis techniques include descriptive, correlational, and mediation tests using IBM SPSS 25. Then the data analysis is continued using path analysis to clarify the mediation between variables that have been identified.

Before testing the hypothesis, a prerequisite analysis test was conducted, namely the data normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of one sample, a linearity test with a significance level of 95% (Sugiyono, 2021). In addition, multicollinearity test variance inflation factor (VIF), and heteroscedasticity test using Glejser test to evaluate the tolerance value. The findings from the normality test indicated normally distributed data, with variables of fieldwork practice, self-efficacy, and work readiness indicating normal distribution because the significance value is greater than 0.05. The linearity test concludes that the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is linear. In the multicollinearity test, there is no multicollinearity between variables. Heteroscedasticity test results were performed using the Glejser test with a significance level > 0.05. This indicates that there is no heteroscedasticity in the sample.

Results and Discussion

The descriptive analysis results showed a great inequality between the minimum and maximum values since the questionnaire created consisted of positive and negative statements. Researchers added negative statements to minimize bias in respondents' answers. Nevertheless, the results of the answers indicate a bias due to the high difference in the minimum and maximum scores. This is a limitation of the research conducted. the descriptive statistics results are in the following table.

Table 2. Results of descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Field-work Practice	306	7	25	20.65	3.4
Self-efficacy	306	6	20	16.21	2.73
Work Readiness	306	12	35	23.61	3.45

SD = Standard Deviation

Based on the descriptive statistical analysis table, the fieldwork practice variable with six statement items obtained an average value of 20.65, a standard deviation of 3.4; the lowest value is 7; the highest value is 25. The difference between the lowest and highest values is 18. For the self-efficacy variable consisting of four statement items, an average value of 16.21 was found, with a standard deviation of 2.73. The lowest value was 6, and the highest value reached 20. Hence, the range of these values was 16. Meanwhile, the work readiness variable, which includes seven statement items, shows an average value of 23.61, a standard deviation of 3.45, the lowest value of 12, and the highest value of 35, with the difference between the lowest and highest values being 23.

Table 3 below displays the correlation coefficients of all the variables. The correlations show a significant relationship between the variables that impact 73.3 percent of work readiness. This table allows a more detailed examination of the significance of each variable separately, and we can note that all variables are statistically significant as they are below the acceptable value (0.05). We can confirm that fieldwork practice, self-efficacy and work readiness impact the sample group of public vocational schools in Surakarta City. Based on the correlation results, fieldwork practice is associated with self-efficacy (B = 0.589), which means it affects self-efficacy so that hypothesis (1) is accepted.

Furthermore, fieldwork practice (B = 0.146) is positively and significantly associated with work readiness, which means hypothesis (2) is accepted. Self-efficacy is the variable

that has the most substantial significant impact on work readiness (B = 0.575). Consequently, hypothesis (3) is accepted.

Table 3. Correlation between variables

Variables	B	Standard Error	Beta	t	R^2	Sig.
FWP * SE	0,589	0,031	0,733	18,799	0,733	0,000
FWP * WR	0,146	0,071	0,144	2,064	0,567	0,040
SE * WR	0,575	0,088	0,454	6,522	0,567	0,000

FWP = Fieldwork Practice, SE = Self-efficacy, WR = Work Readiness

Path analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that self-efficacy mediates the impact of fieldwork practice on work readiness. Furthermore, the significance of mediation was revalidated using SPSS v.25. The hypothesis indicating that self-efficacy acts as a mediator in the impact of fieldwork practice on work readiness was accepted. The correlation value between fieldwork practice and self-efficacy is significant (0.000).

The mediating effect of self-efficacy on the impact of fieldwork practice on work readiness was examined. The correlation between fieldwork practice and work readiness was significant (57.5 percent). After adding self-efficacy as a mediator, ρZX (0.589) and ρYZ (0.575) were significant. Since after both steps, the correlation value of fieldwork practice and work readiness remains significant, hypothesis (d) self-efficacy involved as a mediator in this process is accepted.

The mediating effect of self-efficacy on fieldwork practice with work readiness was examined to validate the results further using SPSS v.25. Path analysis for mediation testing was used. Self-efficacy, fieldwork practice and work readiness were identified as mediating, independent and dependent variables. The total effect (0.928), direct effect (0.589; 0.146; 0.575), and indirect effect (0.339) were significant (see Table 4). The path analysis results reaffirmed the previous correlations, finding that self-efficacy mediates the impact of fieldwork practice on work readiness. Figure 1 presents the research model and the results of the work done. Correlations between crucial variables are significant: fieldwork practice, self-efficacy and work readiness.

Table 4. Value of the relationship between research variables

No	Variables	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
1	ρZX	0,589		
2	ρYX	0,146		
3	ρYZ	0,575		
4	$€_1$		0,339	
5	$€_2$			0,928

ρZX = path coefficients FWP to SE, ρYX = path coefficients FWP to WR, pYZ = path coefficients SE to WR, $€_1$ = coefficients of other variables to SE, $€_2$ = coefficients of other variables to WR.

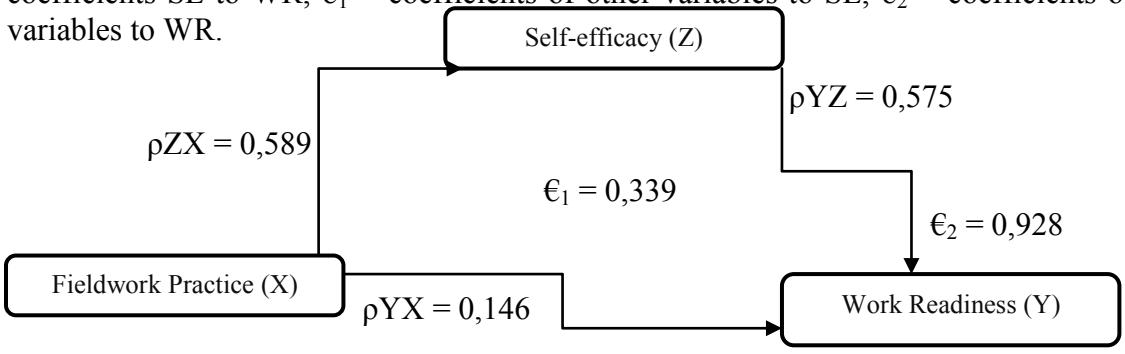

Figure 1. Value of research results

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This research is directed at measuring the impact of fieldwork practice and self-efficacy on vocational school students' work readiness. Nguyen et al. (2022) revealed that practical learning between vocational schools and businesses is an essential prerequisite. His research findings explain that the collaboration of fieldwork practice between vocational schools and the business world is essential. Implementing this fieldwork practice is intended to make students count in business and industry (Setyadi et al., 2021). The results of this study prove that fieldwork practice has a significant impact on work readiness. This strengthens the research results of Yusof & Mohiddin (2018); Chukwuedo & Ementa (2022); Okolie (2022); and Othman et al. (2022), which stated that the implementation of this program is efficacious in improving students' skills and work readiness.

Based on the results of the data analysis, self-efficacy positively influences students' work readiness. Students generally feel more confident when facing stressful situations or problems if they have a higher level of self-efficacy. This condition is in line with the results of research by Tentama et al. (2019), which revealed that self-efficacy plays a role in preparing students to work after graduating from vocational school. Self-efficacy allows students to confidently perform tasks or actions (Chukwuedo & Ementa, 2022). In addition, it can increase through learning experiences and environmental conditions (Lent, 2020; Permana et al., 2023). Thus, self-efficacy can increase the scope of work to form student work readiness. Students who have good self-efficacy will have a positive assessment of themselves and feel confident in their abilities (Magagula et al., 2020). Thus, students will show a greater level of responsibility in completing work, show more flexibility and proficiency in task completion, and have a favorable view of themselves to get a job.

In addition, this study presents the impact of self-efficacy, which significantly mediates between fieldwork practice and work readiness. This answers the statement of Permana et al. (2023) that psychological factors are important to consider for students to have work readiness. According to Bandura (2012), self-efficacy allows students to perform tasks or actions confidently. In the context of SCCT, individuals' belief in their ability to achieve career goals will shape their readiness to enter the world of work (Lent & Brown, 2013). These results complement previous research that tested mediation about practical learning and students' career behavior (Chukwuedo & Ementa, 2022; Okolie, 2022) and confirm the core roles of practical learning self-efficacy, expectations of practical learning outcomes and perceived employability in vocational school graduates' readiness to transition to the world of work (Lent et al., 2022). The results of this study suggest that students who have higher self-efficacy in their ability to perform tasks related to fieldwork practice can, directly and indirectly, improve students' work readiness.

This study confirms the crucial role of fieldwork practice and self-efficacy in improving vocational school students' work readiness. An important implication of this study is that educational institutions and industries must improve synergy in providing quality fieldwork practice so that students can gain practical skills and real industry relevance (Setyadi et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022). Furthermore, increasing students' self-efficacy through supportive learning approaches and positive environments is essential in preparing them for the world of work (Tentama et al., 2019; Permana et al., 2023). These two factors contribute not only to improving work readiness but also to building students' character and adaptability in facing challenges in the workplace.

Conclusion

This study shows that fieldwork practice and self-efficacy are essential in improving vocational school students' work readiness. The findings reveal that fieldwork practice

significantly contributes to developing students' practical skills and work readiness, supporting the hypothesis that practical experience brings students closer to the realities of work. Students' self-efficacy, which is positively influenced by fieldwork practice, was a potent mediator in the relationship between practical experience and work readiness, confirming the importance of students' confidence in their ability to carry out tasks.

Recommendation

Future research needs to explore innovative strategies and methods in integrating fieldwork practice and self-efficacy development, identify enabling environmental factors, and test intervention models that can be widely applied in a vocational school context. There is also a need for further research that examines the long-term impact of fieldwork practice and self-efficacy on students' career success post-graduation, as well as understanding how these factors can be adapted to the changing needs of industry. In light of this, vocational school teachers and policymakers should actively engage with industry to ensure the relevance of their programs and to facilitate the continued adaptation of curricula to meet current industry standards. In addition, they should prioritize forming partnerships with other businesses and organizations to provide students with real-world experience and mentorship opportunities. This approach not only enhances the learning experience but also strengthens students' networks in their chosen fields, thus potentially increasing their employability readiness after graduation.

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