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Analysis of Fieldwork Practice Management for Improving Students' Work Readiness

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the management of the Field Work Practice Program at one vocational high school in Trenggalek and its impact on students' work-readiness. This study employed a qualitative method, with in-depth interviews as the primary data collection technique. Data were analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The research findings indicate that the Field Work Practice program was implemented using a Block Release system over a six-month period during the sixth semester. The implementation stages consisted of a pre-Field Work Practice phase encompassing socialization, briefing, and registration; a core phase involving student placement with business or industry partners, accompanied by regular monitoring; and a post-Field Work Practice phase covering student withdrawal, examination implementation, report preparation, and certificate issuance. The Field Work Practice program was shown to make a positive contribution to the development of students' technical skills, discipline, communication abilities, and understanding of workplace culture. Nevertheless, several challenges remain, including misalignment between the school curriculum and industry needs, as well as differences in the competency levels of teachers and students, particularly in terms of soft skills. Overall, the Field Work Practice program significantly enhanced graduates' work-readiness, though continuous improvement is still needed to optimize outcomes.

Keywords: work readiness, vocational education, students

PENDAHULUAN

The open unemployment rate among Vocational High School (SMK) graduates remains relatively high compared to graduates from other educational levels. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in 2023 indicate that Vocational High School (SMK) graduates are among the groups with the highest unemployment rates in Indonesia. This condition indicates a mismatch between the competencies students acquire in school and the actual demands of the labor market. SMKs are designed as vocational education institutions that directly prepare learners to enter the world of business and industry [1], [2]. This reality raises a crucial question regarding the extent to which the effectiveness of work-based learning programs, particularly Field Work Practice (*Praktik Kerja Lapangan*, PKL), contributes to shaping the work readiness of SMK students [3].

Based on initial observations at SMKN 1 Trenggalek, several final-year students who had completed the Field Work Practice (PKL) program still demonstrated low levels of work readiness, particularly in attitudes, skills, and understanding of industrial work culture. Several students lacked self-confidence when faced with technical tasks, were unable to work independently, and remained dependent on direct instructions from industry supervisors. Moreover, some students experienced confusion when required to adapt to working hours, performance standards, and responsibilities assigned during their Field Work Practice (PKL) placement. These findings indicate that student engagement in the world of work has not yet fully shaped mature work competencies [4], [5], [6].

These problems cannot be viewed solely as individual weaknesses of the students, but are closely related to how the Field Work Practice (PKL) program is planned, implemented, monitored, and evaluated by the school. At SMKN 1 Trenggalek, Field Work Practice (PKL) has indeed become a mandatory component of the curriculum; however, observational findings indicate that its implementation management has not yet been fully structured and standardized. The selection of business and industry partners (DU/DI) is still largely based on the availability of placement opportunities rather than on the level of relevance to students' areas of expertise. In addition, the intensity of monitoring by supervising teachers remains limited, resulting in student guidance at Field Work Practice (PKL) sites not being carried out optimally [7], [8].

As a consequence of weak management, students' learning experiences during Field Work Practice (PKL) vary considerably from one student to another. Some students gain relevant, meaningful work experience, while others are assigned routine tasks that are not directly related to their areas of expertise. This condition results in disparities in competency attainment among Field Work Practice (PKL) participants. Students placed in work environments that do not support learning tend to show no significant improvement in skills and professional attitudes. This further underscores that the success of Field Work Practice (PKL) is determined not merely by the existence of the program, but by the quality of its implementation management [9], [10].

The problems become increasingly complex when linked to current labor market demands, which emphasize not only hard skills but also soft skills such as communication, teamwork, responsibility, discipline, and problem-solving. Based on preliminary interviews with business and industry partners (DU/DI), most Field Work Practice (PKL) students still show weaknesses in work initiative, environmental adaptation, and time discipline. This indicates that the development of students' work character through Field Work Practice (PKL)has not yet been optimally implemented. In other words, Field Work Practice (PKL), which is intended to serve as a means of shaping work ethic, has not yet been fully able to instill these values [11], [12].

Departing from these conditions, this study holds that the primary solution does not lie solely in extending the duration of Field Work Practice (PKL), but rather in improving the Field Work Practice (PKL) management system as a whole, from planning through implementation to evaluation. Well-structured Field Work Practice (PKL) management is considered capable of ensuring that each student obtains learning experiences that are relevant, directed, and aligned with industry competency standards. With proper management, Field Work Practice (PKL) can function as an authentic learning instrument that effectively integrates theoretical learning at school with practical experiences in the world of work [13], [14].

This study offers novelty by examining not only the impact of Field Work Practice (PKL) on students' work readiness but also specifically analyzing how Field Work Practice (PKL) management based on the Block Release pattern at SMKN 1 Trenggalek influences students' work readiness. Unlike previous studies that have largely focused on students' perceptions or post-Field Work Practice learning outcomes, this research investigates the interconnectedness of the pre-Field Work Practice stage, implementation in business and industry settings (DU/DI), monitoring activities, and the post-Field Work Practice stage in shaping work readiness. This focus makes the study more comprehensive and in-depth in identifying the problem's underlying roots.

Through this study, the research aims to identify gaps and weaknesses in the implementation of Field Work Practice (PKL) while simultaneously recognizing the good practices (best practices) that SMKN 1 Trenggalek has applied. These findings are expected to serve as a foundation for designing a more effective, standardized, and industry-aligned Field Work Practice (PKL) management model. Such a model is anticipated to strengthen the role of Field Work Practice (PKL) not merely as a curriculum requirement, but as a key strategy in shaping vocational high school graduates who are fully prepared to enter the workforce.

Based on this background, this study specifically aims to analyze the management of the implementation of the Block Release-based Field Work Practice (PKL) Program at SMKN 1 Trenggalek, to examine the contribution of Field Work Practice (PKL) to the development of students' work readiness in terms of attitudes, skills, and understanding of work culture, and to identify supporting and inhibiting factors in Field Work Practice (PKL) management. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a strategic reference for the development of Field Work Practice (PKL) policies in vocational high schools, while also providing a tangible contribution to efforts to reduce unemployment among SMK graduates by improving optimal work readiness.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design focusing on the implementation and management of the Field Work Practice (PKL) Program at SMKN 1 Trenggalek. This approach was selected because the study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the processes, dynamics, and realities of Field Work Practice (PKL) implementation, as well as its impact on students' work-readiness within a natural setting. The case study design allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon in a detailed, contextual manner within a specific educational institution, yielding data that are specific, in-depth, and comprehensive.

The research subjects consisted of several groups of key informants, namely the Vice Principal for Industry Relations (*Hubungan Industri*; Hubin), the Head of the PKL Working Group, PKL supervising teachers, students who had completed PKL, and representatives of business and industry partners (*Dunia Usaha/Dunia Industri*; DU/DI). The selection of informants was based on purposive sampling, given their direct involvement in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of PKL. The primary criterion for informants was having direct experience in the management or implementation of PKL for at least the past one year.

Primary data collection was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview guidelines were developed based on the research focus: Field Work Practice (PKL) management, covering the pre-Field Work Practice stage, implementation, monitoring, and post-Field Work Practice stage, as well as students' work-readiness, encompassing work attitude, technical skills, and understanding of work

culture. Each interview was conducted for approximately 30 to 60 minutes, recorded using an audio recording device, and subsequently transcribed verbatim for further analysis. In addition to interviews, the researcher conducted non-participant observations of the Field Work Practice (PKL) preparation process and coordination with business and industry partners (DU/DI), as well as several student activities during and after the Field Work Practice (PKL) program.

To strengthen the interview and observation data, the researcher also collected documentary data, including students' PKL journals, PKL reports, lists of business and industry partners (DU/DI), assignment letters for supervising teachers, and school policy documents related to PKL. These documentary data were used to verify field findings while simultaneously deepening the understanding of the PKL management flow within the school. The use of multiple data sources was intended to enrich the information obtained and to enhance the validity of the research findings.

Data analysis was carried out using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of four main stages, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, along with verification. At the data reduction stage, the researcher conducted coding procedures, grouped the data into thematic categories, and identified patterns related to Field Work Practice (PKL) management and students' work-readiness. At the data presentation stage, the findings were organized in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to facilitate the interpretation of meaning and the identification of relationships among categories.

Data trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from the school, students, and business and industry partners (DU/DI). Triangulation was used to compare data from interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, the researcher performed member checking by asking key informants to re-verify the summarized interview results to ensure that the interpreted data accurately reflected their intentions and experiences. This step was undertaken to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Implementation of Field Work Practice at the School

The implementation of the Field Work Practice (PKL) program at SMKN 1 Trenggalek was carried out using a Block Release pattern with a six-month duration in the sixth semester. This system provides students with the opportunity to be fully immersed in the industrial work environment without being divided by school-based learning activities. This condition reflects an institutional awareness that mastery of work-related competencies cannot be achieved solely through classroom instruction but instead requires direct engagement in real work settings. At this stage, students not only learned technical skills but also began to adapt to work culture, working hours, production targets, and professional responsibilities. These findings indicate that SMKN 1 Trenggalek has made efforts to position PKL as a strategic component in developing students' work-readiness.

Nevertheless, the implementation of Field Work Practice (PKL) on a broader scale, particularly in Trenggalek Regency, has not yet fully met the ideal duration standards set by the Directorate of Vocational High School Development, which range from six to twelve months. Most schools can only implement Field Work Practice (PKL) for 4 to 6 months. This situation occurs because students cannot leave core subjects at school for an extended period of time. On the other hand, the limited number of relevant industry partners also constitutes a major inhibiting factor in extending the duration of Field Work Practice (PKL). This condition creates a dilemma between the school's need to meet the national curriculum and the industry's need for a longer training period to ensure that students become genuinely competent.

The limited duration of Field Work Practice (PKL) has a direct impact on students' adaptation processes within the workplace environment [15], [16], [17]. Based on interview results, several students stated that they required a relatively long period merely to become familiar with work procedures and the culture of the industrial setting. By the time students reached a comfortable phase and began to understand their job responsibilities, the Field Work Practice (PKL) period was nearly over. As a result, the competency development process was not yet optimal because the effective learning time in the workplace was relatively short. This finding reinforces the argument that the duration of Field Work Practice (PKL) plays a crucial role in determining the depth of students' learning experiences in the industrial world [18], [19].

In addition to duration, another important aspect of implementing PKL is selecting business and industry partners (DU/DI). SMKN 1 Trenggalek has established several formal requirements for Field Work Practice (PKL) partners, including legal entity status, a clear organizational structure, cooperation with insurance providers, and demonstrated concern for the education sector. Administratively, these provisions indicate the existence of a planned selection system intended to ensure the quality of industry partners. Nevertheless, field findings indicate that administrative eligibility does not necessarily align with the quality of students' learning experiences. Some partners that meet formal requirements were found to lack a strong mentoring culture for Field Work Practice (PKL) students.

As a result, students are sometimes placed in positions that are not relevant to their areas of

competency. Some students are assigned only light, routine tasks, and, in some cases, even tasks outside the field of expertise they are currently studying at school. This situation indicates a gap between the expected link-and-match concept and the reality of field implementation. Such job mismatches reduce students' opportunities to develop their technical skills optimally [20], [21], [22]. Therefore, the quality of Field Work Practice (PKL) experiences is strongly determined by the extent to which industry partners truly understand the educational role of the Field Work Practice (PKL) program itself.

In the pre-Field Work Practice stage, the school carried out a range of comprehensive preparatory efforts, including socialization of activities, completion of forms, enrollment in BPJS Ketenagakerjaan (Employment Social Security Agency of Indonesia), and preparatory sessions on work ethics and discipline. These preparatory activities were intended to equip students with mental readiness and professional attitudes before entering the world of work. The materials delivered included character development, responsibility, communication skills, and the internalization of values such as honesty and work ethic. This stage has significant potential to shape students' initial readiness. However, the effectiveness of this preparation largely depends on the continuity of its application within the industrial environment [23], [24].

Problems arise when the values and rules delivered during the preparatory sessions are not fully enforced at the Field Work Practice (PKL) sites. Several students reported excessive tolerance for minor violations, such as lateness or absenteeism. This situation leads students to experience value confusion, in which the discipline standards taught at school do not align with the realities of the workplace. As a result, the process of internalizing work attitudes becomes inconsistent. In the long term, this condition may weaken the primary objective of Field Work Practice (PKL) in shaping a strong work character [25], [26].

Monitoring conducted by supervising teachers is a highly important form of control in ensuring the success of Field Work Practice (PKL). Teachers carry out site visits, review students' journals, and coordinate with industry supervisors. The research findings indicate that this monitoring function has been implemented, but not yet optimally, due to the limited number of supervising teachers and the considerable distance between DU/DI locations. As a result, several issues cannot be addressed promptly and thoroughly. This condition underscores that the success of Field Work Practice (PKL) is determined not only by program design, but also by the capacity of the human resources responsible for its implementation [27], [28], [29].

At the final stage, namely the post Field Work Practice phase, students are required to prepare a report and undertake a Field Work Practice examination. This process provides space for reflection, allowing students to evaluate the work experiences they have undergone. However, the findings indicate that assessment remains mainly administrative and does not yet fully represent students' actual work competencies. The certificates issued tend to emphasize participation rather than measurable skill attainment. This condition constitutes a critical point that needs to be addressed so that the Field Work Practice evaluation becomes more oriented toward the achievement of tangible competencies [30], [31], [32].

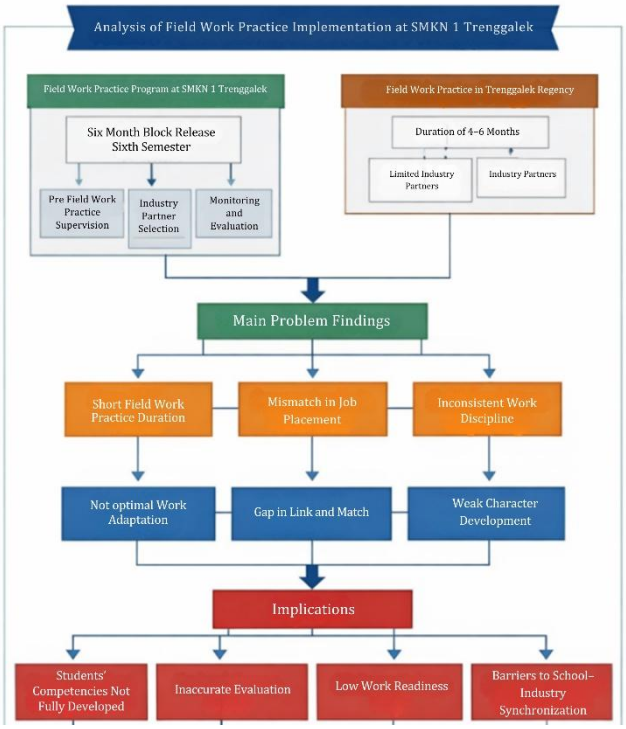

Figure 1. Analysis of the Implementation of Field Work Practice at SMKN 1 Trenggalek

Based on Figure 1, the implementation of Field Work Practice at SMKN 1 Trenggalek has been designed using a block release pattern over six months, encompassing the pre-Field Work Practice stage, the selection of industry partners, and monitoring and evaluation. However, limitations in the duration of Field Work Practice, the quality of industry partners, and the consistency of on-site mentoring give rise to several major issues, including suboptimal student work adaptation, mismatches in job placement, and weak development of work character. These conditions result in students' competencies not being fully developed, assessments that tend to be administrative in nature, and hindered synchronization between the school and the industrial sector.

2. Impact of Field Work Practice on Students' Work Readiness

The research findings indicate that Field Work Practice (PKL) has a positive impact on students' work-readiness, particularly in their understanding

of the real world of work. Students become more familiar with organizational structures, work processes, and the professional demands that must be fulfilled by workers. This experience fosters significant changes in attitudes, shifting students from a previously passive orientation toward greater awareness of responsibility. Students also begin to understand that the world of work requires not only technical skills, but also mental resilience and discipline. Accordingly, Field Work Practice (PKL) functions as a transitional medium between the school environment and the world of work [33], [34].

In addition, students also experience improvements in basic technical skills in accordance with their respective fields of expertise. They are given opportunities to operate real equipment, address actual workplace problems, and directly observe professional performance standards. This context provides authentic learning experiences that cannot be obtained solely from textbooks and school-based simulations. However, the level of competency improvement varies greatly among students. The quality of the Field Work Practice (PKL) placement influences these differences, the types of tasks assigned, and the intensity of guidance provided by industry instructors [35], [36].

Students placed in industries with a strong mentoring culture show greater development than those in less supportive work environments. In workplaces with well-established mentoring systems, students are more frequently involved in core tasks and receive constructive feedback. This condition accelerates the learning process and enhances students' self-confidence. In contrast, students placed in less-structured business and industry settings (DU/DI) often serve merely as passive observers, thereby diminishing the benefits of Field Work Practice (PKL). Accordingly, the quality of industry partners emerges as a key determining factor in the success of Field Work Practice (PKL) [37], [38].

These findings strengthen the idea that work readiness is determined not only by the program itself but also by the quality of experiences students undergo throughout the program. Work readiness encompasses cognitive (knowledge), psychomotor (skills), and affective (attitudes) dimensions. Among these three aspects, the affective dimension or soft skills emerges as the most significant challenge for students. Many students still do not possess strong self-confidence, adequate communication skills, or sufficient initiative in the workplace. This condition indicates that the development of soft skills continues to require more serious attention [39], [40].

Compared with the findings of previous studies, these results are consistent with the study by Munthe [41] which states that direct work experience has a significant effect on the work readiness of vocational high school students. These findings are also in line with the results of Sari and Rejekiningsih [42] who emphasize that experience-based learning enhances graduate employability. However, this study adds a new dimension by showing that Field Work Practice (PKL) management is a key variable often overlooked. Without strong management, students' work experiences tend not to be optimal.

The main difference from previous studies lies in this research's focus, which emphasizes managerial aspects rather than the general impact of Field Work Practice (PKL). This study shows that poor Field Work Practice (PKL) management can reduce, or even eliminate, the positive effects that would otherwise emerge. In other words, the success of Field Work Practice (PKL) is not merely driven by its presence in the curriculum. Still, it is strongly determined by the quality of its planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This is where the primary novelty of this study lies.

When linked to an increasingly competitive world of work, the findings of this study carry important strategic implications. Schools are not merely sufficient to send students to industry placements, but must also ensure that the Field Work Practice environment genuinely supports learning. There is a need to improve the quality of business and industry partner (DU/DI) selection, to develop clear competency standards, and to provide specialized training for both industry and school supervisors. Without these measures, Field Work Practice will lose its transformative capacity in shaping work-ready human resources [43].

Thus, the findings of this study confirm that Field Work Practice (PKL) is an effective instrument for enhancing work readiness, provided it is well managed. Structured Field Work Practice (PKL) management, high-quality industry partners, continuous monitoring, and competency-based evaluation will produce vocational high school graduates who are better prepared to compete in the world of work. This constitutes the principal contribution of this study to the development of Indonesia's vocational education system.

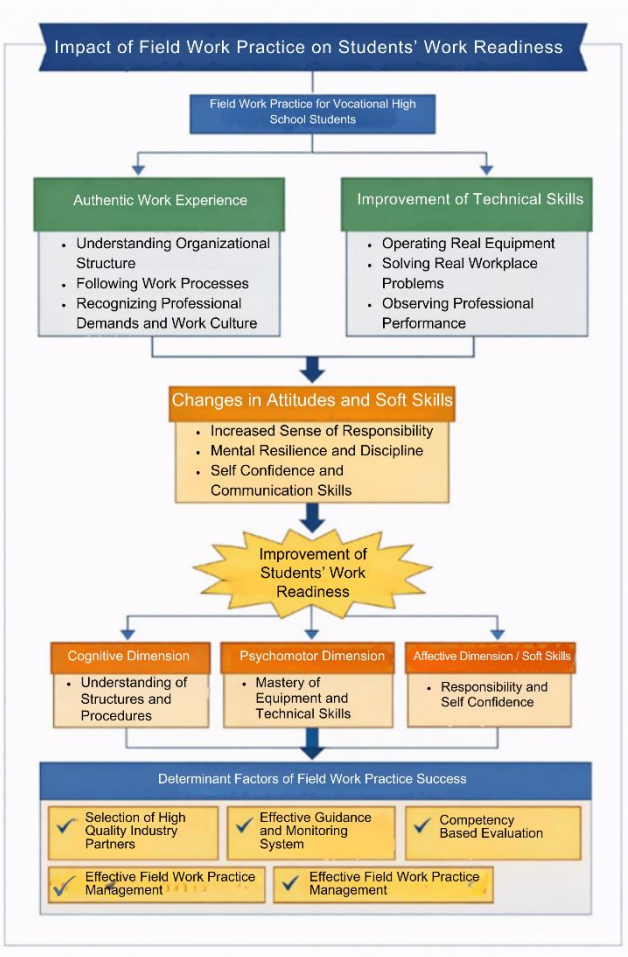

Figure 2. Impact of Field Work Practice on Students' Work Readiness

Based on Figure 2, Field Work Practice has a positive impact on students' work readiness through direct exposure to the world of work, the enhancement of technical skills, and changes in attitudes and soft skills. These impacts are reflected in improvements across the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective dimensions of students' work readiness. However, the effectiveness of Field Work Practice is strongly determined by the quality of program management, the presence of supportive industry partners, a sustainable guidance and monitoring system, and competency-based evaluation. With proper management, Field Work Practice plays a strategic role in preparing vocational high school graduates to enter the world of work.

In addition, this study makes an important contribution to the development of vocational education, particularly in the management of Field Work Practice (PKL). From a practical perspective, the findings recommend the need for the formulation of more integrated national standards for Field Work Practice (PKL) management, the enhancement of supervising teachers' competencies through industry based training, the selection of business and industry partners (DU/DI) based not only on administrative criteria but also on their commitment to student mentoring, and the strengthening of soft skills development programs before and during Field Work Practice (PKL).

Theoretically, this study enriches the body of literature on the relationship between work-based learning management and the work readiness of vocational high school students. This study affirms that the success of Field Work Practice (PKL) is not determined merely by its presence in the curriculum, but by the quality of its management and the synergy between schools and industry. Accordingly, the findings of this study can serve as an important reference for developing more effective Field Work Practice (PKL) models to enhance the work-readiness of future vocational high school graduates.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that Field Work Practice at SMKN 1 Trenggalek is implemented systematically through three main stages: pre-Field Work Practice, implementation, and post-Field Work Practice. This process is supported by preparatory activities, monitoring, assessment, and certificate issuance. These mechanisms indicate that the school deliberately ensures that Field Work Practice is conducted safely and in accordance with established procedures, providing students with authentic learning experiences. In addition, the involvement of parents, supervising teachers, and industry partners constitutes an important factor in the smooth implementation of the program. The positive impacts of Field Work Practice include improvements in technical competencies, soft skills, work readiness, and students' understanding of industrial work culture. However, several issues continue, including limited duration, incomplete alignment between school-based learning and industry needs, a limited number of industry partners, supervising teachers' competencies that have not yet fully met industry standards, and variations in students' soft skills. These constraints are consistent with findings from previous studies that highlight a gap between school curriculum and the demands of the labor market.

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