

# Overview of Work Readiness in Vocational Students

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**Abstract.** Work readiness is closely linked to unemployment, with vocational school graduates facing higher unemployment rates than those from other educational levels. This study aims to describe the work readiness of vocational students as a basis for designing learning systems that better respond to the specific competencies required in the labor market. A descriptive design was used, involving 162 vocational students selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected via an online survey using the Work Readiness Scale. Findings show that 69.14% of students demonstrate high work readiness, while 30.86% fall into the medium category. The strongest dimensions were responsibility (74.07%), health and safety (70.37%), communication (66.67%), and skills (61.11%). Flexibility and self-view were predominantly in the medium range, highlighting areas for improvement. This study contributes empirical evidence for curriculum and training development. The results imply a need for targeted educational interventions that strengthen flexibility and self-perception through contextual learning and direct engagement with the workplace.

**Keywords:** vocational students; work readiness; workplace

## 1 Introduction

As part of the National Education System, Vocational High Schools, commonly abbreviated as SMK, have a main focus on developing the ability of students to work in certain fields [1]. Therefore, in the learning process, SMK students are more involved in programs that seek to place students directly in the world of work, such as through Field Work Practices (PKL). The hope is that SMK students are more accustomed and skilled to face the real world of work than other secondary school graduates.

However, even so, according to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Open Unemployment Rate (TPT) of SMK graduates is still the highest at 9.01% as of August 2024 compared to graduates at other education levels such as elementary school (2.32%), junior high school (4.11%), high school (7.05%), diploma (4.83%) and bachelor's degree (5.25%) [2]. Although the percentage is decreasing from the previous year, SMK graduates still have the highest unemployment rate, which needs to be monitored in the future.

Some research related to the factors that influence it lies in the lack of work readiness among vocational students [3, 5]. The lack of readiness of SMK graduates to face the real world of work is one of the main factors that causes the high unemployment rate [3]. According to several

previous studies, work readiness can help students develop a career identity [6], as well as being a predictor of performance in the world of work [7, 8]. Work readiness is needed when individuals enter the work environment because of the organization's need for competent individuals who can follow the culture and rhythm of organizational work [9, 29]. Work readiness can also encourage individuals to play an active role and participate in various situations at work, and increase job satisfaction [9]. This makes work readiness a very important variable for vocational students to have.

Although work readiness is an important issue in vocational education, quantitative data on the work readiness of vocational high school students are still limited. Therefore, in this study, we want to see the picture of work readiness owned by vocational students. Understanding the picture of vocational students' work readiness will help schools and the government later recognize better what potential is still limited and needs to be developed, so that it can be the basis for developing effective learning processes in schools.

## 2 Literature Review

Work readiness is the personal attributes, individual traits, and coping mechanisms needed to not only obtain employment but also to maintain it [11]. In another definition, Pool and Sewell explain that work readiness is an individual capacity consisting of abilities, knowledge, skills, and personality qualities needed by individuals to obtain the right job and achieve success [12].

Several factors are found to influence individual work readiness, such as internal and external factors. External factors include industrial work practices, family environment, support from people around them, knowledge, as well as information and interaction with the closest people, such as parents, peers, teachers, and so on. While internal factors include self-efficacy, self-confidence, hardiness, grit, career adaptability, interest, talent, and motivation [10, 13, 15].

Work readiness has several dimensions that vary from one figure to another. Brady found six dimensions of work readiness, namely responsibility, flexibility, skills, communication, self-view, and health and safety [11]. Meanwhile, Caballero and Walker suggested four dimensions in work readiness, namely social intelligence, personal characteristics, work competence, and organizational intelligence [16, 29].

In this study, we used the dimensions proposed by Brady, because they follow from previous research that uses more dimensions in the context of vocational students [11, 17, 19]. The six dimensions proposed by Brady are, (a) *Responsibility* – having personal integrity, being honest and trustworthy; (b) *Flexibility* – can adapt to changes and demands from the workplace; (c) *Skills* – can identify the abilities and skills to succeed on the job and has the desire to learn new job-related skills; (d) *Communication* (interpersonal relationship)– can establish good communication in the work environment, such as being able to follow orders, understand how to ask for help, can accept criticism and input, and respect all colleagues; (e) *Self-view* – realizing the ability to adjust, adapt, and perform in the world of work; and (f) *Health and safety* – being able to maintain personal hygiene and neatness, being physically and mentally healthy, and being able to follow safety procedures as required.

### 3 Method

This study uses a quantitative method with a descriptive analysis design to determine the picture of work readiness in vocational students. This survey was conducted online with 162 respondents from a vocational school in Surakarta using a convenience sampling technique. The majority of respondents were female (92.59%) and aged between 15 to 17 years (see table 1).

**Table 1.** Demographic Data (N=162)

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Gender		
Male	12	7,41
Female	150	92,59
Age		
15 years old	7	4,32
16 years old	109	67,28
17 years old	46	28,40

Data collection in the survey used a modified work readiness scale from Nasution [19] based on the theory of Brady [11] with six aspects, namely responsibility, flexibility, skills, communication, self-view, and health and safety. This scale has 30 items with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.944, and the range of item power ranges from 0.353 to 0.815.

### 4 Result

Work readiness research data were not normally distributed ( $p > 0,05$ ; Mean=96.22; SD=8.83). The results of a study of 162 student respondents at a vocational school found that the majority of vocational students have high work readiness (69.14%). Meanwhile, of the 6 dimensions in work readiness, SMK students have the highest presentation in the responsibility dimension (74.07%) and followed by Health and Safety (70.37%), communication (66.67%), and skills (61.11%) (see Table 2). Two dimensions need development in the dimensions of flexibility and self-view, the majority of which are still in the moderate category.

**Table 2.** Categorization of Work Readiness of Vocational Students (N=162)

<b>Variable and Dimension</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>
Work Readiness	0%	30,86%	<b>69,14%</b>
Responsibility	0%	25,93%	<b>74,07%</b>
Flexibility	6,79%	<b>68,52%</b>	24,69%
Skills	0%	38,89%	<b>61,11%</b>
Communication	0,62%	32,72%	<b>66,67%</b>
Self-view	0%	<b>62,96%</b>	37,04%
Health and Safety	0%	29,63%	<b>70,37%</b>

Researchers also conducted a difference test to see if there are differences in work readiness, vocational students based on gender. Based on the analysis using Mann-Whitney U, it was found that there was no significant difference based on gender ( $p > 0,05$ ).

## 5 Discussion

The responsibility dimension in work readiness is the dimension that is mostly in the high categorization (74.07%). Responsibility is having personal integrity, being honest, and trustworthy [11]. This indicates that vocational students have been able to take responsibility for their tasks or at least know that there are responsibilities that must be fulfilled in every given task. When individuals are given a task, they understand that there are responsibilities imposed on them regardless of whether they are supervised or not.

The learning that SMK students have experienced from the smallest level of education, namely elementary school, to secondary school, has instilled the value of responsibility. According to Brady, this responsibility is not limited to personal responsibility, but also to colleagues and the workplace [11]. This broader definition of responsibility is seen as an important element for workers in the 21st century [11]. In addition, the vocational school curriculum, which is oriented toward real-world tasks, has also fostered awareness of individual responsibility for one's role and function, both personally and professionally.

The second dimension that has a high categorization in SMK students is health and safety (70.37%). Individuals who have high health and safety are those who can maintain personal hygiene and neatness, are physically and mentally healthy, and can follow safety procedures as requested [11]. Based on this, it can be seen that vocational students have the awareness and willingness to choose and practice occupational health and safety behavior by following every occupational health and safety policy in the workplace. Classroom learning and work practices that have been followed by vocational students make them more familiar with the behaviors that are accepted in the workplace and those that are not. Therefore, as an important behavior in the workplace, health and safety have been understood and are being obeyed by students.

The next dimension of work readiness with high categorization in vocational students is communication at 66.67%. Communication is part of social competence to support interpersonal relationships that have been shown to positively predict job performance and satisfaction [11]. Students with high communication skills will be able to establish good communication in their work environment. These behaviors include being able to follow orders, understanding how to ask for help, being able to accept criticism and input, and respecting all colleagues [11]. Vocational students in this study have understood the basics needed to build these interpersonal relationships, so they are better prepared to face the world of work.

The skills dimension is the fourth dimension of the work readiness variable owned by vocational students in the high categorization, which is 61.11%. Skills are individual skills related to their work and their willingness to learn new skills according to job demands. One of them is their willingness to participate in employee training and continuing education programs [11]. According to self-determination theory, competence is one of the three basic needs of individuals [11, 20]. Based on this, it means that the SMK students who were respondents in

this study have recognized their job skills and have a willingness to acquire new skills and engage in training. This will further improve their readiness to enter the workforce.

Meanwhile, two dimensions of work readiness of vocational students were also found to be in the moderate category, namely flexibility and self-view. Flexibility is the ability of students to be able to adapt to changes and demands from the workplace [11]. This may be due to learning patterns that are still too structured, a lack of exposure to situations that require improvisation or adaptation, and limited access to information on current job trends. Today's world of work, which tends to change quickly, also requires individual flexibility. On the one hand, a high level of self-direction and autonomy is needed to maintain continuity between the world of vocational education and the work environment, but on the other hand, there is a growing need to change and learn to face new vocational development tasks [21]. Vocational students who are currently in the medium category in the flexibility dimension need up-to-date information about the world of work. Vocational students also need to develop the ability to be open to learning new things and build open and adaptive communication. According to research, the ability of individuals to be adaptable can increase individual work readiness [13, 22, 25]

The last dimension in work readiness that is still in the moderate category is self-view. Self-view is the ability of students to realize their potential. This will later be useful in adjusting, adapting, and presenting themselves optimally in the world of work [11]. These results indicate that most students do not yet have strong confidence in their abilities and potential. This may be due to a lack of reflective processes in learning, such as a lack of strength-based assessment or a lack of psychosocial support from teachers and the school environment. This low self-view can hinder students' active involvement in learning and the world of work. Meanwhile, students who have a positive assessment of themselves and feel confident in their abilities will be able to act independently in their learning or practical tasks. These students also tend to be more courageous in making decisions and expressing opinions [26]. Mahdi and Armalita's research found that confidence in making career decisions is positively correlated with students' perceptions of their readiness to enter the workforce [27].

We also tested for differences in work readiness based on gender and found no significant differences between men and women related to work readiness. This result is consistent with previous studies that also found that, rather than being determined by gender, work readiness is more determined by skills, knowledge, and the capacity to process information [28]. The absence of significant differences in work readiness also indicates that men and women now have equal opportunities to engage in the career development process [28].

## **6 Conclusion**

The results of descriptive analysis in this study indicate that the work readiness of vocational students is high. The dimensions that have the highest percentage are responsibility, health and safety, communication, and skills. Meanwhile, development is needed in the dimensions of flexibility and self-view, the majority of which are still in the moderate category. This study found that flexibility and self-view are still underdeveloped, even though both are important for surviving and thriving in a rapidly changing work environment. This raises concerns about the long-term adaptability of vocational graduates and indicates that the current curriculum may not be sufficient in developing students' capacities. Therefore, this study not only provides empirical evidence for curriculum development but also highlights the urgent need for educational

interventions. Particularly those prioritizing adaptability, reflective thinking, and other essential personal development aspects in preparing students for the uncertainties of the future workforce.

This study cannot be separated from several limitations, one of which is the limited sample size. Future research should use a larger sample size and expand the scope, and not be limited to one school or region. This is done to increase the generalizability of the findings to a wider population. In addition, this study used Brady's questionnaire [11]. Although this questionnaire is suitable for use in the context of vocational students, these results can also be compared when the research is conducted with other questionnaires, such as Caballero and Walker. Therefore, the suggestion for future research is to use different questionnaires in measuring vocational students' work readiness to get more comprehensive results.

In addition to these limitations and research suggestions, this study also provides important contributions and implications for policymakers in the field of education, such as schools or teachers. The empirical data found in this study can be used to develop more relevant curriculum and training, such as creating work readiness programs that refer to the dimensions of work readiness mentioned above. In addition, the empirical data in this study can be utilized in developing educational intervention programs that emphasize strengthening flexibility and self-view through contextual learning and direct work experience. Career adaptability or self-efficacy development programs for vocational high school students can take the form of several activities. The government, through its ministries, has implemented the Merdeka Belajar program, which provides flexibility in curriculum development. These findings support the need to integrate programs that focus on developing students' flexibility and self-perception into the vocational high school curriculum. For other researchers, the results of this study can also be used as a basis for building work readiness models, especially for vocational students in Indonesia.

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