

Analyzing work readiness among vocational high school graduates: The role of field work practice and motivation to enter the workforce

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Abstrak

Tingginya angka pengangguran lulusan sekolah vokasi di tengah ketatnya persaingan industri menunjukkan adanya celah dalam kesiapan kerja yang perlu segera diatasi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh Praktik Kerja Lapangan (PKL) dan motivasi memasuki dunia kerja terhadap kesiapan kerja alumni SMKN 1 Karanganyar Tahun Ajaran 2023/2024, baik secara parsial maupun simultan. Jenis penelitian ini adalah kuantitatif dengan data primer yang dikumpulkan melalui angket skala Likert via Google Form. Populasi penelitian mencakup 528 alumni dengan sampel sebanyak 228 responden yang ditentukan melalui teknik *proportionate stratified random sampling*. Teknik analisis data menggunakan regresi linier berganda dengan uji *t* dan uji *F* pada taraf signifikansi 0,05 menggunakan SPSS 20. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa: (1) PKL berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kesiapan kerja alumni dengan nilai (*t*hitung 11,598 > *t*tabel 1,652) dan kontribusi efektif sebesar 40,8%; (2) motivasi memasuki dunia kerja berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap kesiapan kerja dengan nilai (*t*hitung 4,827 > *t*tabel 1,652) dan kontribusi efektif sebesar 12,3%; serta (3) secara simultan, PKL dan motivasi berpengaruh positif terhadap kesiapan kerja dengan nilai (*F*hitung 127,411 > *F*tabel 3,04) dan total kontribusi efektif sebesar 53,1%. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pengalaman praktik dan motivasi internal secara bersama-sama merupakan faktor penentu kesiapan alumni dalam menghadapi dunia kerja. Hasil ini mengimplikasikan pentingnya penguatan sinergi antara sekolah dan industri untuk meningkatkan kualitas PKL serta perlunya program bimbingan karier yang intensif guna membangun motivasi kerja siswa sejak dini.

Kata kunci: praktik kerja lapangan; motivasi memasuki dunia kerja; kesiapan kerja profesional; kompetensi vokasi

Abstract

The persistently high unemployment rate among vocational high school graduates amid intensifying industrial competition reveals a critical gap in workforce readiness that demands immediate attention. This study examined the influence of Field Work Practice (FWP) and motivation to enter the workforce on the work readiness of alumni from SMKN 1 Karanganyar for the 2023/2024 academic year, analyzing both partial and simultaneous effects. A quantitative

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Citation in APA style: Maharani, E. S., & Susantiningrum, S. (2026). Analyzing work readiness among vocational high school graduates: The role of field work practice and motivation to enter the workforce. *Jurnal Informasi dan Komunikasi Administrasi Perkantoran*, 10(3), 371–379.

<https://dx.doi.org/10.20961/jikap.v10i3.117491>

research design was employed, with primary data collected through Likert-scale questionnaires administered via Google Forms. The study population comprised 528 alumni, from which 228 respondents were selected using proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were analyzed using multiple linear regression with t-tests and F-tests at a significance level of 0.05, processed through SPSS 20. The findings revealed that: (1) FWP exerted a positive and significant effect on alumni work readiness (tobserved = 11.598 > tcritical = 1.652), with an effective contribution of 40.8%; (2) motivation to enter the workforce demonstrated a positive and significant influence on work readiness (tobserved = 4.827 > tcritical = 1.652), contributing 12.3%; and (3) simultaneously, FWP and motivation positively influenced work readiness (Fobserved = 127.411 > Fcritical = 3.04), with a combined effective contribution of 53.1%. These findings confirm that practical field experience and intrinsic motivation collectively constitute determining factors in alumni workforce readiness. The results underscore the imperative of strengthening school–industry partnerships to enhance FWP quality and implementing intensive career guidance programs to cultivate students’ work motivation from an early stage.

Keywords: work readiness; motivation to enter the workforce; field work practice; vocational competence

Received April 15, 2026; Revised June 19, 2026; Accepted June 21, 2026; Published Online June 23, 2026

<https://dx.doi.org/10.20961/jikap.v10i3.117491>

Introduction

The rapid advancement of science and technology has fundamentally transformed the quality standards of human resources, intensifying labor market competition and requiring mastery of specific competencies alongside adaptive professional characteristics. Education, particularly at the vocational high school (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMK) level, plays a strategic role as a platform for developing industry-oriented technical capacity through the internalization of adaptive abilities and mental maturity that support career transitions (Susilo & Ismiyati, 2020). However, a significant discrepancy persists between strategic policy objectives and empirical realities. Fatimah and Murwaningsih (2022) articulated that although vocational schools are designed to mitigate unemployment, their graduates paradoxically constitute a substantial proportion of open unemployment in Indonesia. Data from the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), derived from the February 2024 National Labor Force Survey (Sakernas), corroborate this phenomenon, recording 1.62 million unemployed vocational school graduates—equivalent to 22.2% of the total 7.20 million nationally unemployed individuals (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). This issue is further compounded by the mismatch between educational curricula and the actual demands of the business and industrial world (DUDI), where the effectiveness of work readiness is highly contingent upon the alignment of competencies with the latest industrial technologies (Hasibuan et al., 2025).

Theoretically, work readiness is conceptualized as a state of physical, mental, and experiential maturity that constitutes the foundational basis for navigating professional dynamics (Nugroho et al., 2020). This phenomenon can be examined through Edward Thorndike’s connectionism theory, specifically the Law of Readiness, which postulates that successful competency acquisition is contingent upon an individual’s physiological and psychological maturity in responding to stimuli (Meutiawati, 2024). Beyond psychological maturity, self-efficacy represents a crucial factor; individuals possessing high confidence in their capabilities tend to demonstrate more mature work readiness following training (Damayanti et al., 2024). This preparedness is shaped by internal factors—including psychological stability, intelligence, and intrinsic motivation—as well as external factors encompassing labor market information accessibility, digital literacy, and the optimization of Field Work Practice (FWP) programs (Riyanti & Kasyadi, 2021).

As an integral component of the Dual System Education (Pendidikan Sistem Ganda/PSG) framework, FWP applies the learning-by-doing concept to produce workers equipped with the professional work ethic and specialized skills required by industry (Wahyuni et al., 2021). Although the majority of studies, such as those

by Putri and Suhartini (2021) and Luthfi (2020), have identified a significant positive influence of FWP on work readiness, Fatimah and Murwaningsih (2022) reported contradictory findings, thereby reinforcing the urgency for further evaluation. This gap was reflected in a preliminary study conducted among 78 alumni of SMK Negeri 1 Karanganyar for the 2023/2024 academic year, which revealed that only 24.36% of respondents felt fully prepared for employment, while 75.64% reported a lack of readiness. Regarding competency, 52.56% of alumni perceived their technical skills as inadequate, and 52.57% assessed their FWP experience as insufficient to serve as a foundation for transitioning into industrial settings.

Beyond technical factors, motivation to enter the workforce—driven by a combination of intrinsic factors such as self-esteem and extrinsic factors such as environmental conditions (Chotimah, 2020)—functions as a catalyst for professional adaptation. The findings of Setiadi (2021) and Susilo and Ismiyati (2020) support a positive correlation between motivation and work readiness, although observational data indicated that 73.08% of alumni exhibited passive tendencies when their environment did not necessitate employment. Given the complexity of these variables, this study aimed to empirically examine the influence of FWP and motivation to enter the workforce on alumni work readiness. SMK Negeri 1 Karanganyar provides a Special Job Fair Service (Bursa Kerja Khusus/BKK) whose primary function is to facilitate the placement of graduates with various industrial partners. The school offers multiple programs, including seminars, job fairs, competency examinations, and a mandatory FWP program. Nevertheless, persistent passive behavior has been identified among some students, reflected in low active engagement in both learning processes and vocational practice activities. This passive tendency not only impedes the acquisition of technical competencies but also reduces independent initiative in exploring career opportunity information.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study formulated three research questions: (1) Does FWP influence the work readiness of SMKN 1 Karanganyar alumni for the 2023/2024 academic year? (2) Does motivation to enter the workforce influence the work readiness of these alumni? (3) Do FWP and motivation to enter the workforce simultaneously influence alumni work readiness? Accordingly, three hypotheses were posited, each predicting a positive influence of the respective variables on work readiness. The novelty of this study lies in its analysis of work readiness among post-pandemic graduates confronting a more digitalized and competitive labor market, with a specific focus on the integration of practical experience (FWP) and internal drive (motivation) within the context of SMK Negeri 1 Karanganyar.

Research Methods

This study was conducted at SMK Negeri 1 Karanganyar, located at Jl. Monginsidi No. 1, Tegalgede, Karanganyar District, Karanganyar Regency, Central Java Province (postal code 57714). The selection of this site was based on the availability of relevant data sources and the urgency of the research problem, which aligned with the study's focus on work readiness.

A quantitative methodology with a descriptive approach was adopted. The quantitative design was selected to test hypotheses concerning causal relationships between variables and to analyze the extent to which independent variables influence the dependent variable, consistent with the methodological framework proposed by Sugiyono (2021).

The study population comprised all 528 alumni of SMK Negeri 1 Karanganyar for the 2023/2024 academic year, distributed across six specialization programs. Using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error, the sample size was determined at 228 respondents. A probability sampling strategy employing proportionate stratified random sampling was utilized to ensure that each class was proportionally represented according to its alumni count, thereby providing accurate population representation. The sample distribution across specialization programs was as follows: 46 alumni from Accounting (AKL), 30 from Office Management (MPLB), 30 from Marketing, 46 from Fashion Design, 46 from Visual Communication Design (DKV), and 30 from Culinary Arts (ULP).

Data were collected using a questionnaire instrument employing a four-point Likert scale with response options of "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." The four-point scale was adopted to eliminate the neutral response tendency (Sugiyono, 2021). The work readiness instrument was developed based on the theoretical framework of Muspawi (2020), encompassing the dimensions of skills, knowledge, understanding, and personality attributes. The instruments for FWP and motivation to enter the workforce were constructed following the indicators proposed by Riyanti and Kasyadi (2021). The instruments were distributed

digitally via Google Forms following validity and reliability testing with 93 respondents outside the core sample. Across all three variables—work readiness, FWP, and motivation to enter the workforce—all 12 items per variable were confirmed as valid. Item validity was established using the criterion of $r_{observed} > r_{table}$ at a significance level below 0.05 using Pearson’s correlation. Reliability was measured using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient with a minimum threshold of 0.6. The resulting reliability values were 0.844 for work readiness, 0.820 for FWP, and 0.669 for motivation to enter the workforce, confirming all instruments as suitable for use.

Data analysis was performed using multiple linear regression to identify the effects of independent variables on the dependent variable, facilitated by IBM SPSS Statistics version 20.0. Prior to hypothesis testing, classical assumption tests were conducted, including normality, linearity, multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity (using Spearman’s rho method), and autocorrelation tests to ensure the adequacy of the regression model. The final stage of analysis encompassed hypothesis testing through t-tests (partial) and F-tests (simultaneous), multiple linear regression analysis, coefficient of determination analysis, and calculation of the effective and relative contributions of each variable.

Results and Discussion

Results

The data analysis sequence commenced with prerequisite testing to ensure the adequacy of the statistical model. Based on research data collected from 228 respondents through 12 validated instrument items, a normality test was conducted to detect residual distribution patterns. Employing the Kolmogorov–Smirnov method in SPSS Statistics 20, normal distribution criteria are satisfied when the significance value exceeds the threshold of 0.05. As presented in Table 1, the calculated significance value was 0.420, indicating that the research data were normally distributed.

Table 1.

Normality Test Results (Kolmogorov–Smirnov)

Parameter	Value
N	228
Mean	≈0
Std. Deviation	2.376
Absolute (Most Extreme Differences)	0.058
Positive	0.058
Negative	–0.055
Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z	0.881
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.420

A linearity test was conducted to verify the existence of a linear relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The linearity parameter was established by examining the significance value in the Deviation from Linearity row; a value exceeding 0.05 indicates a linear relationship. As shown in Table 2, the significance value on the Deviation from Linearity row for the relationship between FWP (X1) and work readiness (Y) was 0.071, which exceeds 0.05. Therefore, a linear relationship between FWP and work readiness was confirmed.

Table 2.

Linearity Test Results for FWP (X₁) and Work Readiness (Y)

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups (Combined)	1444.905	18	80.273	13.717	0.000
Linearity	1287.360	1	1287.360	219.985	0.000
Deviation from Linearity	157.546	17	9.267	1.584	0.071
Within Groups	1223.077	209	5.852		
Total	2667.982	227			

Table 3 presents the linearity test results for the relationship between motivation to enter the workforce (X₂) and work readiness (Y). The significance value on the Deviation from Linearity row was 0.062, exceeding the 0.05 threshold. Consequently, a linear relationship between motivation to enter the workforce and work readiness was confirmed.

Table 3.
Linearity Test Results for Motivation (X₂) and Work Readiness (Y)

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups (Combined)	912.306	19	48.016	5.689	0.000
Linearity	668.943	1	668.943	79.252	0.000
Deviation from Linearity	243.363	18	13.520	1.602	0.062
Within Groups	1755.676	208	8.441		
Total	2667.982	227			

The multicollinearity test aimed to determine whether strong correlations existed among the independent variables in the regression model. The prerequisite for the absence of multicollinearity is satisfied when the Tolerance value exceeds 0.10 and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) falls below 10. As presented in Table 4, both FWP and motivation to enter the workforce exhibited a Tolerance value of 0.811 and a VIF of 1.234. Since all independent variables satisfied the criteria of Tolerance > 0.10 and VIF < 10, the regression model was confirmed to be free from multicollinearity.

Table 4.
Multicollinearity Test Results

Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Field Work Practice (X ₁)	0.811	1.234
Motivation to Enter the Workforce (X ₂)	0.811	1.234

The heteroscedasticity test was conducted to verify that the residual variance of the regression model remained constant (homoscedasticity). This study employed Spearman's rho correlation method, correlating all independent variables with the absolute residual values (Abs_Res). The regression model is deemed free from heteroscedasticity when the significance value between the independent variable and the absolute residual exceeds 0.05. As summarized in Table 5, FWP yielded a significance value of 0.229 (> 0.05), and motivation to enter the workforce produced a significance value of 0.407 (> 0.05). Since all significance values consistently exceeded the 0.05 threshold, the regression model was confirmed to be free from heteroscedasticity and suitable for predicting work readiness based on the investigated independent variables.

Table 5.
Heteroscedasticity Test Results (Spearman's Rho)

		X ₁	X ₂	Abs_Res
Spearman's Rho	X ₁ Corr. Coeff.	1.000	0.454	0.080
	Sig. (2-tailed)	–	0.000	0.229
	X ₂ Corr. Coeff.	0.454	1.000	–0.055
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	–	0.407

The autocorrelation test examined whether the regression model contained correlations between the error term at period t and that at the preceding period (t–1). Testing was performed using the Runs Test method, which detects autocorrelation based on the randomness of residual data. The decision criterion stipulates that autocorrelation is absent when the Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value exceeds 0.05. As demonstrated in Table 6, the

Runs Test yielded an Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value of 0.086, which exceeds 0.05, confirming that the residuals were random and the regression model was free from autocorrelation.

Table 6.

Autocorrelation Test Results (Runs Test)

Parameter	Unstandardized Residual
Test Value ^a	-0.108
Cases < Test Value	111
Cases ≥ Test Value	117
Total Cases	228
Number of Runs	102
Z	-1.716
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.086

Having satisfied all classical assumption tests, the regression model proposed in this study was deemed adequate, and the analysis proceeded to hypothesis testing.

Hypothesis testing was conducted comprehensively through multiple linear regression analysis, encompassing partial (t-test) and simultaneous (F-test) analyses. The results of the multiple linear regression analysis and t-test are presented in Table 7.

Table 7.

Multiple Linear Regression Results (t-Test)

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	6.051	2.133	–	2.836	0.005
Field Work Practice	0.578	0.050	0.588	11.598	0.000
Motivation	0.265	0.055	0.245	4.827	0.000

As shown in Table 7, the multiple linear regression model generated in this study is expressed by the equation $Y = 6.051 + 0.578X_1 + 0.265X_2 + e$, where the constant value of 6.051 represents the baseline level of work readiness when other variables are held at zero. The regression coefficient of 0.578 for FWP and 0.265 for motivation to enter the workforce indicate that each one-unit increase in these variables corresponds to increases in work readiness of 0.578 and 0.265 units, respectively, assuming other variables remain constant.

The t-test results confirmed that FWP (X_1) exhibited a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$ with $t_{observed} = 11.598 > t_{critical} = 1.652$, leading to the rejection of H_0 and acceptance of H_a . This confirms a significant positive influence of FWP on the work readiness of SMKN 1 Karanganyar alumni for the 2023/2024 academic year. Similarly, motivation to enter the workforce (X_2) yielded a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$ with $t_{observed} = 4.827 > t_{critical} = 1.652$, thereby rejecting H_0 and confirming a significant positive influence of workforce entry motivation on alumni work readiness.

The simultaneous test via the F-test yielded $F_{observed} = 127.411$, exceeding $F_{critical} = 3.04$ at a significance level of 0.000, as detailed in Table 8. This result confirms that both variables jointly exert a positive influence on the work readiness of SMKN 1 Karanganyar alumni for the 2023/2024 academic year.

Table 8.

Simultaneous Test Results (F-Test)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1416.900	2	708.450	127.411	0.000
Residual	1251.082	225	5.560		
Total	2667.982	227			

Following the F-test, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was calculated to ascertain the extent to which the model explains the variability of the dependent variable, along with the contributions of each independent variable. The results of the coefficient of determination analysis are summarized in Table 9.

Table 9.

Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	0.729	0.531	0.527	2.358

As indicated in Table 9, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.531, implying that FWP and motivation to enter the workforce collectively account for 53.1% of the variability in work readiness, while the remaining 46.9% is attributable to other factors not examined in this study. Furthermore, contribution analysis revealed that FWP accounted for an effective contribution of 40.8% and a relative contribution of 76.8%, whereas motivation to enter the workforce contributed an effective share of 12.3% and a relative share of 23.2% to alumni work readiness.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping the work readiness of SMKN 1 Karanganyar alumni for the 2023/2024 academic year. Regarding the first dimension, FWP was found to serve a vital role as a transitional bridge to the professional world. Through FWP, students not only acquire realistic work experience but also refine technical skills aligned with their competency areas. This phenomenon demonstrates a positive linear relationship: the more optimal the practical experience obtained, the higher the resulting quality of work readiness. This finding reinforces the studies of Liyasari and Suryani (2022) and Maulidy et al. (2022), which positioned FWP as a key determinant in preparing students for the workforce. Moreover, Haq and Adiwati (2024) emphasized that field practice functions as a mechanism for integrating classroom theory with industrial reality. This integration process is critical for closing the skills gap and assisting students in understanding workplace ethics and technical demands, collectively building their professional confidence.

Beyond the technical experience dimension, the second finding confirms that motivation to enter the workforce constitutes a highly influential psychological factor in determining the maturity of alumni professional preparedness. Motivation functions as a primary predictor; students with high motivation tend to exhibit adequate readiness, while low motivation frequently represents a substantial barrier to career initiation. This result aligns with the research of Sari and Mariyanti (2024) and Zahmelinda and Armiati (2023), who partially demonstrated that motivation contributes positively and directionally to work readiness. Furthermore, Kuhu et al. (2023) explained that motivation transcends mere desire for employment; it constitutes a mental force that renders students more resilient in confronting challenges during the transition from school to the authentic work environment.

The culmination of these findings reveals a powerful synergy between practical experience (FWP) and internal drive (motivation to enter the workforce). Mathematically, each improvement in FWP quality accompanied by strengthened motivation proportionally enhances the quality of alumni work readiness. Consistent with the findings of Indira and Kurniawan (2020), these two variables are complementary and inseparable. An individual possessing excellent FWP experience but lacking strong work motivation will tend to experience diminished confidence when confronting real-world challenges. Conversely, high motivation unsupported by adequate FWP experience results only in technical unpreparedness. Therefore, the integration of field competency and psychological drive constitutes the primary determining factor in producing competitive vocational graduates prepared to compete in the industrial world.

The dominance of FWP's contribution, reaching 76.8% in relative terms, indicates that for SMKN 1 Karanganyar alumni, technical experience in industry far more decisively determines work readiness than internal motivation. This is attributable to the inherent characteristics of vocational education, which emphasizes hard skill mastery and adaptation to authentic work environments. Although motivation continues to contribute (23.2%), without the practical proficiency acquired during FWP, graduates will remain insufficiently prepared to meet industrial demands that prioritize direct technical competence. This finding affirms that the quality of field experience remains the primary pillar of graduate work readiness.

Conclusion

Based on the data analysis using SPSS 20.0, this study provides empirical evidence that FWP exerts a positive and significant influence on the work readiness of SMKN 1 Karanganyar alumni for the 2023/2024 academic year. An analogous pattern was observed for motivation to enter the workforce, which partially contributed substantially to preparing alumni for the professional world. Collectively, both variables constitute determining factors underlying alumni work readiness. The findings demonstrate that FWP contributes far more dominantly than internal motivation, affirming that within the vocational education context, the mastery of technical skills through direct interaction with the industrial world represents the primary pillar of work readiness.

As a synthesis of the research findings, work readiness cannot be sustained solely through field-based technical experience (FWP) but must be supported by strong psychological drive (motivation). The integration of practical competencies acquired during FWP with mature career orientation creates a critical synergy in building alumni confidence and mental preparedness for effectively transitioning from education to the workforce. Practically, these findings can serve as strategic references for educators in designing guidance programs and motivational stimulation initiatives to accelerate professional maturity prior to labor market entry. Concurrently, students are advised to optimize their FWP period as the primary vehicle for mastering technical skills and to proactively cultivate a professional mentality to compete in the competitive labor market.

This study was conducted in accordance with scientific procedures; however, several limitations warrant attention for future research. First, the study focused exclusively on two independent variables—FWP and motivation to enter the workforce—whereas graduate work readiness may also be influenced by other internal and external factors not incorporated into the present model. Second, the data collection scope was limited to alumni of SMK Negeri 1 Karanganyar for the 2023/2024 academic year, with a sample of 228 respondents, potentially constraining the generalizability of findings to alumni of vocational schools in different regions or specialization areas. Future research is recommended to broaden the scope of variables by incorporating additional relevant factors and to expand the population and sample to yield more comprehensive and widely generalizable results.

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