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The Influence Of The Independent Curriculum And Field Work Practice On Students' Competency Mastery In Vocational High Schools

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ABSTRACT

An internship program (PKL) is a learning opportunity for students to gain structured and relevant work experience before graduating from an academic program. This study aims to analyze the effect of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Field Work Practice (PKL) on the competency mastery of students in the Light Vehicle Engineering (LVE) specialization at vocational high schools (SMKs) in Kotamobagu City. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is expected to improve the quality of learning through a flexible, student-centered approach, while Field Work Practice provides students with authentic workplace experience to strengthen competencies aligned with the needs of industry and the labor market. This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design. The population consisted of Light Vehicle Engineering students from four vocational high schools in Kotamobagu City who had completed their Field Work Practice program. Data were collected using questionnaires and analyzed using multiple linear regression to determine the partial and simultaneous effects of the independent variables on students' competency mastery. The findings are expected to indicate that both the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Field Work Practice have a positive and significant effect on students' competency mastery. Simultaneously, these two variables contribute to improving students' knowledge, technical skills, and professional attitudes in accordance with industry requirements. The results of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for schools, teachers, and industry partners in optimizing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Field Work Practice programs to produce competent, professional, and work-ready vocational graduates.

Keywords: merdeka curriculum, field work practice, competency mastery, light vehicle engineering, vocational high school

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INTRODUCTION

Education, as stipulated in Law No. 20 of 2003 of the Republic of Indonesia, is a conscious and well-planned effort to create a learning

environment and learning process that actively encourages learners to develop their full potential, including spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and the skills required for themselves, society, the nation, and the state. In addition to fostering intellectual development, education plays a fundamental role in cultivating moral

values, character, and practical skills that enable individuals to contribute effectively to society.

Education is essentially a process of human development that aims to produce individuals with strong character, academic competence, and professional skills. Achieving high-quality education requires continuous improvements in various aspects, particularly the quality of teachers and educational personnel. In Indonesia, the formal education system consists of elementary schools, junior secondary schools, senior secondary schools, and vocational high schools (Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan/SMKs). Vocational education primarily aims to prepare graduates who are ready to enter the workforce by equipping them with competencies that meet industrial requirements.

To improve the quality of vocational education, the Indonesian government has introduced several educational reforms, including the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the strengthening of Field Work Practice (PKL) programs. According to Government Regulation No. 66 of 2010, vocational high schools are formal educational institutions that provide vocational education at the secondary level and prepare students with practical competencies required in specific occupational fields. Consequently, vocational education plays a strategic role in producing competent human resources capable of meeting the demands of modern industries.

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes essential learning materials, flexible instructional strategies, and differentiated learning experiences that allow students to

deepen conceptual understanding while strengthening their competencies. This curriculum grants schools greater autonomy to design learning activities that are responsive to local conditions and industrial needs. Furthermore, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is intended to enhance both students' hard skills and soft skills, ensuring that graduates are better prepared to face future challenges and rapidly changing workplace demands.

Within the Merdeka Curriculum framework, Field Work Practice (PKL) is an integral component of the curriculum structure. PKL may be conducted either online or offline depending on the characteristics of each vocational specialization and the competencies to be achieved. The primary objective of PKL is to provide students with authentic workplace experiences that enable them to internalize professional values, develop work ethics, strengthen soft skills, and improve technical competencies relevant to their field of specialization.

Field Work Practice also enables students to apply the theoretical knowledge and practical skills acquired at school in real industrial settings. As technological advancement continues to reshape various industrial sectors, particularly the automotive industry, vocational graduates are expected to possess comprehensive knowledge of modern automotive systems and technologies. Consequently, vocational schools must continuously adapt their learning processes to ensure that graduates remain relevant to industry expectations.

One of the essential responsibilities of vocational schools is developing students' practical competencies through workshop-based learning activities. In the Light Vehicle Engineering (LVE) specialization, students are expected to acquire competencies that enable them to become professional automotive technicians capable of managing automotive workshops, performing vehicle maintenance and repair, understanding chassis and power transmission systems, and diagnosing automotive electrical systems.

The successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Field Work Practice programs has become a major concern for vocational schools and educational stakeholders because both are expected to bridge the gap between school-based learning and industrial practice. Through direct workplace learning experiences, students are expected to develop professional attitudes, practical competencies, and adaptive skills required by the labor market.

All vocational high schools in Kotamobagu City have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum during the past two academic years. Consequently, the implementation of PKL has also been adjusted to align with the curriculum, particularly in the Light Vehicle Engineering specialization. Through this integration, students are expected to internalize workplace culture while improving both technical competence and employability.

However, preliminary interviews conducted with teachers from four vocational high schools revealed several challenges. The curriculum implemented at schools has not yet been fully aligned with industrial requirements,

resulting in less optimal Field Work Practice experiences and limited competency improvement among students. Additional problems include students' difficulties in adapting to the new learning approaches introduced under the Merdeka Curriculum, uneven competency achievement among students, and challenges in adjusting to workplace environments due to differences between school regulations and industrial practices.

Although the Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented for approximately two years, its implementation in several schools has not yet achieved optimal results. Consequently, many students still experience difficulties in adapting to competency-based learning and maximizing the benefits of their Field Work Practice experiences.

Based on these conditions, investigating the influence of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Field Work Practice on students' competency mastery in the Light Vehicle Engineering specialization at vocational high schools in Kotamobagu City is considered both relevant and necessary. Therefore, this study aims to examine the extent to which the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Field Work Practice contributes to improving students' competency mastery in vocational education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research approach using an explanatory research design to examine the influence of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Field Work

Practice (PKL) on students' competency mastery in the Light Vehicle Engineering (LVE) specialization at vocational high schools in Kotamobagu City.

The study was conducted at four vocational high schools offering the Light Vehicle Engineering specialization in Kotamobagu City, namely SMK Negeri 1 Kotamobagu, SMK Negeri 2 Kotamobagu, SMK Cokroaminoto Kotamobagu, and SMK Muhammadiyah Kotamobagu. The research focused on students who had completed their Field Work Practice program.

The population of this study consisted of all Grade XII students in the Light Vehicle Engineering specialization who had participated in the Field Work Practice program. The research sample was selected using proportional random sampling to ensure that each student had an equal opportunity to participate. The total sample consisted of 107 respondents.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure three research variables: the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (X_1), Field Work Practice (X_2), and students' competency mastery (Y). All questionnaire items were developed based on relevant theoretical indicators and were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Prior to data collection, the research instrument was subjected to validity and reliability testing to ensure its accuracy and consistency. The validity test was performed using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation technique, while the reliability of the instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha

coefficient. Only questionnaire items that met the required validity and reliability criteria were included in the final analysis.

Descriptive statistical analysis was first conducted to describe respondents' characteristics and the distribution of responses for each research variable. Subsequently, inferential statistical analysis was performed using multiple linear regression to determine both the partial and simultaneous effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

Before conducting the regression analysis, several classical assumption tests were carried out, including the normality test, multicollinearity test, and heteroscedasticity test, to ensure that the regression model satisfied the statistical assumptions required for multiple linear regression analysis.

The multiple linear regression model employed in this study is expressed as follows:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon$$

where:

- Y = Students' Competency Mastery
- α = Constant
- β_1, β_2 = Regression coefficients
- X_1 = Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum
- X_2 = Field Work Practice (PKL)
- ε = Error term

Hypothesis testing was conducted using the t-test to examine the partial effect of each independent variable and the F-test to evaluate their simultaneous effect on students' competency mastery. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was also calculated to determine the proportion of variance in students'

competency mastery explained by the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Field Work Practice.

All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics software. The level of statistical significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$, meaning that hypotheses were accepted when the significance value (p-value) was less than 0.05.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

In this study, data on independent and dependent variables were used. The independent variables are the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum (X1) and field work practice (PKL) (X2), while the dependent variable is students' competency mastery (Y), which was collected through surveys both online and offline. This section presents a description of the data for each research variable that has been analyzed, including the mean, median, mode, and standard deviation. In addition, frequency distribution tables and trend tables for each variable are also shown.

a. Implementation of the Independent Curriculum (X1)

The results of the variable data on the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum (X1) were obtained from a survey filled out by 84 students with 12 questions. The scores from all the questions were summed to get the total score of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum variable for each respondent. Based on the processing of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum data using SPSS 26.0, the analysis results showed a maximum value of 48, a minimum of 27, a mean of 39.20, a median

of 39, a mode of 36, and a standard deviation of 4.636.

Based on the descriptive statistical calculations, the tendency category of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum variable is as follows:

Table 1. Category of Independent Curriculum Implementation

NO.	Skor	F	Presentase (%)	Kategori
1	$42,7 \leq X \leq 48$	21	25	Sangat Tinggi
2	$37,5 \leq X < 42,7$	31	37	Tinggi
3	$32,2 \leq X < 37,5$	29	34	Kurang Tinggi
4	$27 \leq X \leq 32,2$	3	4	Rendah
Jumlah		84	100%	

Based on the descriptive statistical calculations, the tendency category of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum variable is as follows:

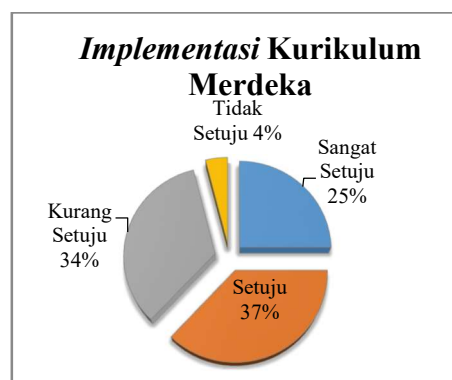


Figure 1. Diagram of the Trend in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

Based on the table and images above, the trend of the variable shows that the implementation of the independent curriculum has 21 students (25%) in the strongly agree category, 31 students (37%) in the agree category, 29 students (34%) in the somewhat agree category, and 3 students (4%) in the disagree category. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the tendency of the Independent Curriculum implementation among

vocational high school students in Kotamobagu City falls into the agree category.

b. Field Work Practice (PKL) (X2)

The results from the fieldwork practice variable (X2) data were obtained from a survey filled out by 84 students with 12 questions. The scores from all the questions were summed to get the total score for the fieldwork practice variable for each respondent. Based on processing the fieldwork practice data using SPSS 26.0 software, the analysis results showed a maximum value of 48, minimum of 27, mean of 39.60, median of 40, mode of 40, and a standard deviation of 4.383.

Based on the descriptive statistical calculations, the trend categories for the fieldwork practice variable are as follows:

Table 2. Fieldwork practice category

No	Skor	F	Presentase (%)	Kategori
1	$42,7 \leq X \leq 48$	25	30	Sangat Tinggi
2	$37,5 \leq X < 42,7$	29	35	Tinggi
3	$32,2 \leq X < 37,5$	28	33	Kurang Tinggi
4	$27 \leq X \leq 32,2$	2	2	Rendah
Jumlah		84	100%	

Based on the table of categories for the tendencies of the fieldwork practice (PKL) variables, it can be illustrated in the following diagram:

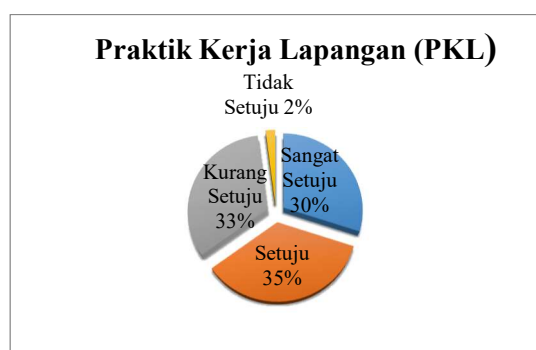


Figure 2. Diagram of Field Work Practice Trends (PKL)

Based on the table and images above regarding the variable trends, it can be seen that field work practice (PKL) shows that 25 students (30%) strongly agree, 29 students (35%) agree, 28 students (33%) somewhat agree, and 2 students (2%) disagree. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the tendency of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum among vocational high school students in Kotamobagu City falls into the agree category.

c. Student Competency Mastery (Y)

The variable of students' competency mastery in this study was measured using a documentation technique in the form of competency test scores (UKK) for 12th-grade TKR students at 4 vocational schools in Kotamobagu in the 2024/2025 academic year. Based on descriptive statistical calculations, the tendency categories of the students' competency mastery variable are as follows:

Table 3. Table of students' competency mastery categories

No	Skor	F	Presentase	Kategori
1	$90 \leq X \leq 100$	45	42	Sangat Kompeten
2	$80 \leq X < 90$	62	58	Kompeten
3	$70 \leq X < 80$	0	0	Cukup Kompeten
4	$0 \leq X \leq 70$	0	0	Kurang Kompeten
Jumlah		107	100	

Based on the table of the tendency categories of student competency mastery variables, it can be shown in the following diagram:



Figure 3. Diagram Image of Student Competency Mastery Trends

Based on the table and the trend variable chart, it can be seen that students' mastery of competence shows 45 students (42%) in the very competent category, 62 students (58%) in the competent category, while the less competent and not competent categories are 0. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the tendency of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum for vocational high school students in Kotamobagu City falls into the competent category.

d. Normality Test

The normality test is conducted to find out whether the variable data are normally distributed or not, because the analysis used requires the data to be normally distributed. In this study, the normality test uses the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method with the help of SPSS software version 26.0. Data are considered normally distributed if the Kolmogorov-Smirnov value and the Unstandardized Residual Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) value are greater than 0.05. Conversely, if the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Unstandardized Residual Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) values are less than 0.05, the data are considered not normally distributed. The results

of the normality test are presented in the following table:

Table 4. Normality Test Results

Variabel	Asymp.Sig	Hasil Pengujian
Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka (X1)	0,200	Normal
Praktik Kerja Lapangan (PKL) (X2)	0,072	Normal
Penguasaan Kompetensi Siswa (Y)	0,078	Normal

Based on the results of the normality test in Table 10, it is known that the Asymp. Sig value of the Implementation of the independent curriculum variable is $0.200 > 0.05$, so this variable is declared to have a normal distribution. The fieldwork practice (PKL) variable also has an Asymp. Sig value of $0.200 > 0.05$, so it is normally distributed, and the student competency mastery variable has an Asymp. Sig value of $0.078 > 0.05$, so this variable is also declared to be normally distributed.

e. Multicollinearity Test

The multicollinearity test aims to find out whether there is a strong relationship between the independent variables in the regression model. The multicollinearity assumption states that independent variables should not have a high correlation with each other. If there is a strong relationship between independent variables, the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable can be disrupted. This condition can make the resulting regression model less accurate or invalid. The results of the

multicollinearity test can be seen in the following table:

Table 5. Multicollinearity Test Results

Variabel	Tolerance	VIF	Kesimpulan
X1 dan X2	0,997	1,003	Tidak Terjadi Multikolinearitas

Based on Table 11, it can be seen that the tolerance values for X1 and X2 are $0.997 > 0.1$ and the VIF value is $1.003 < 10$, so it can be concluded that there is no multicollinearity in these two variables. After the prerequisite tests for the analysis were carried out and the results were met, the next step was to conduct the path analysis test.

f. Uji Hipotesis

1) First Hypothesis Test

In the first hypothesis, this study examines whether the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum (X1) affects students' competency mastery (Y) in vocational high schools across Kotamobagu City. The test was conducted using simple regression analysis processed with SPSS version 26.0, and the results are presented as follows:

Table 6. Uji Regresi X1-Y

Sumber	Koefisien	r	r ²	T
Konstanta	5,718	0,945	0,893	26,156
Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka	0,949			

Based on the regression analysis results, the regression coefficient for variable X1 is 0.949, which shows a positive effect, and the significance value is $0.000 < 0.05$, indicating that variable X1 has a significant effect on variable Y.

Regression Line Equation

Based on the calculations above, the regression line equation can be expressed as follows:

$$Y = 5.718 + 0.949 X_1$$

This equation shows that the regression coefficient is positive at 0.949. This means that if the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (X1) increases, then students' competency mastery (Y) will increase by 0.947 units.

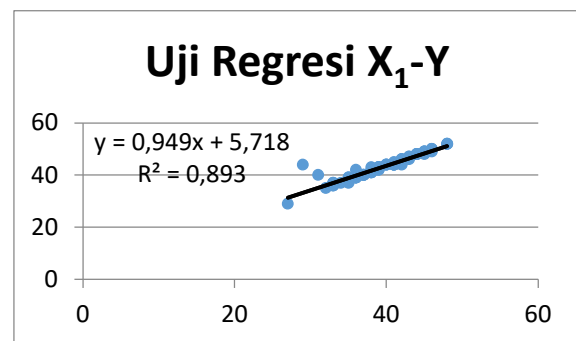


Figure 4. Grafik Uji regresi X1-Y

1. Coefficient of Determination (r²) between X1 and Y

Based on the data analysis results in Table 12, the coefficient of determination (r²) is 0.893, which means that the influence of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum (X1) on student competency mastery (Y) in vocational schools across Kotamobagu City is 89.3%, while the remaining 10.7% is influenced by other factors.

2. Significance Test with t-Test

Based on the analysis using SPSS 26.0 software, the calculated t-value is 26.156, while the t-table value at a 5% significance level is 1.664. This shows that the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum (X1) has a significant effect on student competency mastery (Y).

2) Second Hypothesis Test

In the second hypothesis, this study examines whether field work practice (X2) affects student competency mastery (Y) in vocational schools across Kotamobagu City. The testing was carried out using simple regression analysis processed with SPSS version 26.0 software, with the results displayed:

Table 7. Uji Regresi X2-Y

Sumber	Koefisien	r	r ²	T
Konstanta	8,539	0,817	0,668	12,852
Praktik Kerja Lapangan (PKL)	0,868			

Based on the results of the regression analysis, the regression coefficient value for variable X2 is 0.868, which indicates a positive effect, and the significance value is $0.000 < 0.05$, showing that variable X2 has a significant influence on variable Y.

Regression Line Equation

Based on the calculations above, the regression line equation can be expressed in the following equation:

$$Y = 8.539 + 0.868 X_2$$

This equation shows that the regression coefficient value is positive at 0.868. This means that if the value of field work practice (PKL) (X2) increases, the value of students' competency mastery (Y) will increase by 0.868 units.

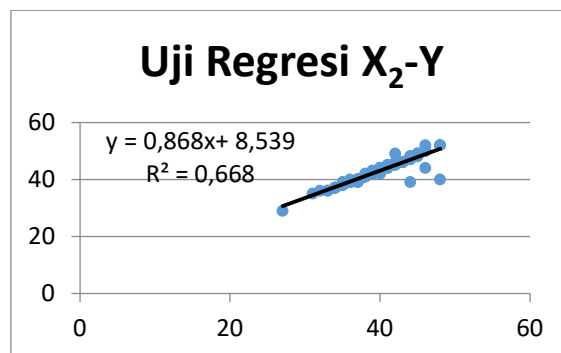


Figure 5. Grafik Uji Regresi X₂-Y.

1. Coefficient of Determination (r²)

Between X₂ and Y Based on the data analysis results in Table 12, the coefficient of determination (r²) is 0.668, which means that the effect of Field Work Practice (X₂) on students' competency mastery (Y) in SMKs across Kotamobagu City is 66.8%, while the remaining 33.2% is influenced by other factors.

2. Significance Test with t-Test

Based on the analysis using SPSS 26.0 software, the calculated t-value was 12.852, while the t-table value at a 5% significance level was 1.664. This indicates that the fieldwork practice (PKL) (X₂) has a significant effect on students' competency mastery (Y).

3) Third Hypothesis Test

In the second hypothesis, this study examined whether the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum (X₁) and fieldwork practice (PKL) (X₂) affect students' competency mastery (Y) in vocational schools in Kotamobagu City. The test was conducted using simple regression analysis processed with SPSS version 26.0, and the results are presented as follows:

Table 8. Uji Regresi Ganda

Sumber	Koefisien	r	r ²	T
Konstanta	5,718	0,975	0,950	0,975
Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka	0,949			
Praktik Kerja Lapangan (PKL)	0,346			

Based on the regression analysis results, the regression coefficient value for variables X1 and X2 is 0.868, indicating a positive effect, and the significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$ shows that variables X1 and X2 have a significant effect on variable Y.

Regression Line Equation

Based on the calculations above, the regression line equation can be expressed as follows:

$$Y = 0.733 + 0.727 X1 + 0.346 X2$$

This equation shows that the regression coefficient for variable X1 is 0.727. This means that if the implementation of the independent curriculum (X1) increases, the students' competency mastery (Y) will increase by 0.727, assuming variable X2 remains constant. In addition, the regression coefficient for variable X2 is 0.346, indicating that if fieldwork practice (X2) increases, competency mastery will also increase. student (Y) will also increase by 0.346 assuming variable X1 remains constant.

1. Determination Coefficient (r^2) between X1 and X2 on Y

Based on the data analysis results in Table 14, the coefficient of determination (r^2) was obtained as 0.950, which means that the influence of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum (X1) and fieldwork practice (PKL) (X2) on students' competency mastery (Y) in vocational

schools throughout Kotamobagu City is 95%, while the remaining 5% is affected by other factors.

2. Significance Test with F Test

Based on the analysis results using SPSS 26.0 software, the calculated F value (Fhitung) was 770.659, while the F table value at a 5% significance level was 3.11. If the calculated F value is equal to or greater than the F table value at a 5% significance level, then the variable is considered to have a significant effect. Based on the test results, the calculated F value of $770.659 > F$ table value of 3.11. This shows that the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum (X1) and fieldwork practice (PKL) (X2) have a significant influence on students' competency mastery (Y).

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and discussion, the conclusions can be drawn as follows:

1. The implementation of the independent curriculum has a positive and significant impact on the mastery of competencies of students in the Light Vehicle Engineering expertise concentration at vocational schools across Kotamobagu City, with an effect of 89.3%.
2. Field work practice (PKL) has a positive and significant impact on the mastery of competencies of students in the Light Vehicle Engineering expertise concentration at vocational schools across Kotamobagu City, with an effect of 66.8%.

3. The contribution of the implementation of the independent curriculum and field work practice simultaneously on the mastery of competencies of students in the Light Vehicle Engineering expertise concentration at vocational schools across Kotamobagu City is 95%.

Suggestion

1. For Educational Institutions (Vocational High Schools in Kotamobagu City)
To the schools, especially teachers in the Light Vehicle Engineering concentration, to continue improving the quality of implementing the Independent Curriculum and conducting Field Work Practices (PKL). This effort needs to be carried out in a directed and sustainable manner so that learning becomes more relevant to the needs of the workforce and can optimally improve students' competency mastery.
2. For the Business and Industrial Sector (DUDI)
It is expected that DUDI strengthens cooperation with schools and provides maximum guidance during PKL so that students gain relevant and professional work experience.
3. For Future Researchers
Future research is advised to add other variables that may influence students' competency mastery or expand the research subjects so that the research results become more comprehensive.

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