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Self-Efficacy: The Key to Readiness to Face the Challenges of the World of Work in Vocational Students

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the influence of self-efficacy on work readiness among vocational high school students in the Jabodetabek region. A quantitative correlational approach was employed, involving 149 students selected through accidental sampling. Data were collected using the Work Readiness Scale (WRS) and the New General Self-Efficacy Scale (NGSES), both of which had been tested for validity and reliability. The results of the analysis showed a significant and positive effect of self-efficacy on work readiness ($R^2 = 0.453$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that self-efficacy accounts for 45.3% of the variance in students' work readiness. These findings confirm that students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to be confident and prepared to enter the workforce. However, most students demonstrated moderate levels of self-efficacy, indicating the need for targeted interventions. The study also revealed that psychological factors were more dominant than demographic factors in predicting work readiness, as no significant correlation was found between readiness and gender, school type, or internship duration. These results underscore the importance of integrating self-efficacy-enhancing strategies into vocational education to strengthen students' preparedness for employment.

INTRODUCTION

Vocational High School (SMK) is one of the secondary education systems that prioritizes skill development and prepares students to compete in the professional workforce (Kemendikbud, 2018). An internship program is one of the most important components of vocational education (Liu, 2021). An internship program is a type of training offered outside of regular school hours and is especially created to satisfy the needs of the business sector. One of the objectives of the internship, such as Praktik Kerja Lapangan (PKL), is to improve technical competency mastery and apply skills. Although internships are supposed to boost SMK students' employment rates, the opposite is occurring, with up to 1.6 million SMK graduates losing their jobs in August 2024, rising to 1.8 million in the same month (BPS,

2024). One of the many reasons for the rising unemployment rate among SMK graduates is that students are not adequately preparing for the workforce (Sabilah et al., 2021). This disparity suggests that current efforts may not sufficiently address psychological and employability competencies, pointing to a disconnect between the goals of internship programs and their actual effects on students' readiness for the workforce.

Callabero et al. (2011) define work readiness as the capacity to thrive in the workplace. Four key components are used to measure this success: (1) personal qualities, such as direction, self-awareness, adaptability, and high flexibility; (2) organizational intelligence, which is the capacity to comprehend workplace dynamics and organizational culture; (3) work competence, which is the possession of pertinent knowledge and skills that can be applied in the workplace; and (4) social intelligence, which is the capacity to interact effectively with coworkers and form positive relationships. According to Rafiola et al. (2020), work readiness is important because it facilitates the completion of tasks and aids in the achievement of goals for individuals as well as organizations.

Additionally, studies by Nur'aini et al. (2024) demonstrate that self-efficacy can boost confidence in one's ability to perform tasks effectively, particularly in the workplace. Furthermore, since work readiness is linked to landing good jobs and paying well, it will improve well-being (Mazzocchi et al., 2024; Okolie, 2022). However, despite the vocational education sector's strong relevance to these outcomes, there is still a dearth of focused and underdeveloped research in this area, particularly about psychological readiness. Given the urgency of using SMK to address youth unemployment, there is a significant gap in the literature.

External factors that affect work readiness include the family environment, workplace environment, job security, advancement opportunities, relationships with coworkers and superiors, and salary. Internal factors include psychological factors like personality and professional aspirations and goals (Setyadi et al., 2021; Fauzan et al., 2023). One of the most often studied internal factors is self-efficacy, which Bandura defined as a person's confidence in their ability to accomplish goals (Ghufron & Risnawita, 2020). Three essential elements make up self-efficacy: generality (transferability across domains), strength (confidence in ability), and level (perceived task difficulty). High self-efficacy people are usually more introspective, conscious of their advantages and disadvantages, and therefore better equipped to deal with obstacles at work (Makki et al., 2023).

Numerous earlier studies have examined the connection between self-efficacy and work readiness, demonstrating the consensus that psychological resources are essential for preparing people for the workforce. Because it affects how people react to novel, uncertain, or complex work-related tasks, self-efficacy has been found to be a core predictor of adaptability a crucial aspect of work readiness (Vanny et al., 2022). The ability to manage job responsibilities, adjust to changes, and persevere in the face of challenges is a critical skill for a smooth transition into the working world, and people with high self-efficacy are more likely to possess these traits.

This perspective is supported by a recent meta-analysis by Fangonil-Gagalang (2024), which reaffirmed the importance of self-efficacy as a predictor of work readiness across a range of employee populations as well as among students. Similarly, research has demonstrated that vocational high school students who have higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to be prepared for the workforce in terms of communication skills, professional behavior, and willingness to learn Chotimah & Suryani, (2020). These results imply that promoting self-efficacy may be a viable strategy for closing the skills gap and enhancing the transition from school to the workplace, particularly in vocational education settings.

Although self-efficacy is widely acknowledged as a key psychological factor influencing work readiness, the findings in the literature remain inconsistent. Some studies

(Chotimah & Suryani, 2020; Vanny et al., 2022) report a positive relationship, whereas others (Khampirat, 2021; Sagone & Indiana, 2023) find no significant effect. These contradictions suggest that the relationship may not be universal and could be moderated by various contextual factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural values, support systems, and personal characteristics. Differences in measurement tools and conceptualizations of self-efficacy and work readiness may also contribute to these inconsistencies. Most importantly, self-efficacy is often treated as a general construct, overlooking its sub-dimensions level, strength, and generality that may differently influence specific components of work readiness such as adaptability, task competence, and social interaction.

Furthermore, the vocational education context remains underrepresented in research on psychological predictors of employability, despite the increasing unemployment rates among vocational high school graduates. Existing studies have focused mainly on college students and used cross-sectional designs, limiting the ability to examine causality or developmental change. This leaves a gap in understanding how self-efficacy and work readiness evolve, particularly during critical school-to-work transitions. Additionally, while self-efficacy and work readiness are associated with well-being, few studies have explored their joint contribution to long-term outcomes like job satisfaction, emotional resilience, or life success. These gaps highlight the need for more nuanced, context-specific, and theoretically grounded research, particularly among vocational students who face distinct psychological and structural challenges in preparing for the workforce.

Understanding these interconnections is crucial not only for academic advancement but also for informing policy and program development that supports young people in achieving sustainable and fulfilling work lives. Therefore, this study aims to address these multiple gaps by investigating whether self-efficacy significantly influences work readiness among vocational high school students. The study emphasizes capturing the complexity of self-efficacy as a multidimensional construct. It seeks to generate findings informing more context-sensitive and evidence-based interventions within SMK environments. The hypothesis proposed is (1) There is a significant influence of self-efficacy on work readiness among vocational high school students.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research method uses a quantitative approach, which aims to determine the relationship between two or more variables (Arikunto, 2017). The population were vocational students in Jabodetabek, and the sampling technique used was accidental sampling. Determination of the number of samples in this study using G*Power 3.19.7 ($f2 = 0.015$; $p = 0.05$), with at least 138 respondents. The independent variable in this study is (IV) self-efficacy, and the dependent variable is job readiness (DV).

The research instrument used Caballero et al. (2011), namely the work readiness scale (WRS) which totalled 64 items. There are four aspects to measure work readiness: (1) personal characteristics, for example, the item ‘I understand my abilities well’. (2) organizational intelligence, for example, the item ‘I am well aware of the ethics in my current workplace’. (3) work competence, example item ‘I have the ability to organize well’. (4) social intelligence, example item ‘I am able to collaborate well in a team’. The measuring instrument used a Likert scale with five options (1 = ‘Strongly Disagree’; 5 = ‘Strongly Agree’).

The research instrument used to measure self-efficacy was Chen et al. (2001), namely the New General Self-Efficacy Scale (NGSES). This instrument has eight measurement items, which are divided into three aspects, namely (1) level, for example, the item ‘when I face difficulties, I believe I can get through it’. (2) strength, an example of an item ‘I will be able

to solve all challenges at work'. (3) generality, an example of an item 'I am in general confident that I will achieve goals that are important to me'. The measuring instrument used a Likert scale with five options (1 = 'Strongly Disagree'; 5 = 'Strongly Agree').

All measuring instruments used in this study went through a content validity process, using two experts, and obtained satisfactory results. Furthermore, a trial process was carried out to ensure that the instrument was good at measuring variables (Table 1). However, there are 23 items on the work readiness measuring instrument and 1 item that has a corrected item total correlation coefficient that is below 0.3. This indicates that some items are still unable to measure what you want to measure (Field, 2009). Therefore, the items were revised or improved, and the measuring instrument was tested again on 60 vocational students. The results of the second trial showed changes, but there were still 11 items that had a coefficient below 0.3 on the work readiness measuring instrument. Researchers considered not including the 11 items (2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 13, 16, 18, 19, 21, 63) in the data collection process. Thus, the work readiness measuring instrument items changed, becoming 53 items.

Table 1. Reliability

Variables	Reliability		Note
	Pilot 1	Pilot 2	
Work Readiness	0.88	0.935	64 to 53 items
Self-efficacy	0.72	0.826	8 items

The procedure for collecting data in this study began by first asking permission from several vocational high schools. After obtaining permission from the school, the researcher asked permission from the teacher to contact the class leader (in this case, class XII) and distribute questionnaires online using Google Forms.

Hypothesis testing in the study used simple regression analysis, using Jamovi 19.1 software. The results show that the residual data is normally distributed ($Z = .200$, $p > .05$), and the data does not experience multicollinearity (Tolerance= $.60 \geq .20$; VIF= $1.0 < 10$). Based on the heteroscedasticity test, there is no clear pattern in the scatter plots, where the dots spread above and below zero.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The number of participants involved in this study was 149 vocational students. The participants' gender in the study was dominated by 51% girls and 49% boys, with an age range of 16 to 18 years, and was dominated by 17-year-olds (54.4%). Most (67.1%) came from private vocational schools and participated in praktik kerja lapangan (87.2%). Almost all participants participated in the internship program (Praktik Kerja Lapangan) within the range of 0-3 months (90.6). An overview of the participants' sociodemographic distribution data can be seen in Table 2.

The categorization of student work readiness is in the medium range (47%) to high (53%), and self-efficacy is in the medium range (51.7%) to high (48.3%). These indicate that the participants' work readiness and self-efficacy are already in a good category, although there are still opportunities to improve. These results mean that participants already have confidence in their competencies and are confident that they can work well in the future.

Tabel 2. Demographic Description

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	73	49,0%
Female	76	51,0%
Age		
16 years	4	2,7%
17 years	81	54,4%
18 years	58	38,9%
19 years	6	4,0%
School's Type		
Negeri	49	32,9%
Swasta	100	67,1%
Internship Experience		
Yes	130	87,2 %
No	19	12,8 %
Tenure Internship		
0 - 3 months	135	90,6 %
4 - 6 months	14	9,3%

The results of the inter-dimensional correlation between self-efficacy and work readiness Table 3 show that self-efficacy is significantly and positively correlated with work readiness ($r = .67$; $p<0.01$). This result shows that the higher the self-efficacy, the more ready participants are to work. Furthermore, it was found that all dimensions of work readiness were positive and significantly correlated with self-efficacy. The results also show that high self-efficacy will also correlate with good personal characteristics ($r=.75$; $p<0.01$), high organizational intelligence ($r=.88$; $p<0.01$), qualified work competence ($r=.90$; $p<0.01$), and good social intelligence ($r=.72$; $p<0.01$). Results also showed that there was no correlation between sociodemographics and work engagement variables, so there were no covariates in the regression process.

Table 3. Correlations

No.	Variables	M	SD	1	2	4	5	6
1	Work Readiness	162,15	16,96	-				
2	Self-efficacy	24,92	3,17	.67**	-			
3	Personal Characteristics[a]	34,09	3,95	.75**	.50**	-		
4	Organizational Accuments[a]	61,94	7,24	.88**	.55**	.51**	-	
5	Work Competency[a]	48,12	5,87	.90**	.67**	.59**	.70**	-
6	Social Intellegence[a]	17,97	3,18	.72**	.44**	.50**	.48**	.60**

**P<0.01; *p<0.05;
[a]Work Readiness Dimensions

A simple linear regression was conducted to test the research hypothesis regarding the predictive role of self-efficacy on work readiness. As shown in Table 4, the results reveal that self-efficacy significantly predicts work readiness among vocational students ($F(1,147) = 121.690$, $p = 0.001$). The regression coefficient ($B = 3.593$) indicates that for every one-point increase in self-efficacy, the participants' work readiness score is expected to increase by 3.593 points. This high proportion of explained variance underscores the central importance of self-efficacy as a psychological predictor of work readiness. It suggests that strengthening students'

self-efficacy through skills training, mentoring, or experiential learning—could significantly enhance their confidence and preparedness for employment.

While 54.7% of the variance remains unexplained and may be attributable to other factors (e.g., external support systems, prior experiences, academic achievement, or personality traits), this result provides strong empirical support for targeting self-efficacy in interventions to improve employability among vocational students. The acceptance of the hypothesis (H1) confirms that the relationship between self-efficacy and work readiness is not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful, offering valuable insights for educational policymakers, vocational training providers, and career development practitioners.

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression

Variables	B	SE	Beta	t	*p*
Constant	72.610	8.182		8.874	.000
Self-efficacy	3.593	.326	.673	11.031	.000

Constant: 72.610, F(1,147)=121.690**, p<0.01, R^2= .453

The present study aimed to examine the effect of self-efficacy on work readiness among vocational high school students in the Jabodetabek area. The findings reveal that self-efficacy significantly predicts students' level of work readiness. This indicates that students who perceive themselves as more capable and confident in their abilities tend to demonstrate greater preparedness for entering the workforce. These results are consistent with prior research by Afriadi et al. (2018), which found a positive relationship between self-efficacy and work readiness among vocational students. Lubis and Khairani (2021) further emphasized that students with higher self-efficacy are more capable of completing tasks and demonstrating work performance. Moreover, Borg et al. (2023) observed that self-efficacy plays a critical role in enhancing decision-making skills during the early stages of employment. Aligning with this, Zeng et al. (2022; Zammitti et al. 2024) concluded that students with high self-efficacy are more likely to achieve career success and life satisfaction due to better preparedness and access to decent work.

Descriptive categorization results indicated that participants' work readiness was predominantly in the moderate to high range, suggesting that they possess essential competencies such as job-related skills, critical thinking, and social interaction. This supports assertion that individuals with strong work readiness can more easily adjust and succeed in their occupational roles. Similarly, Fauzan et al. (2023) noted that work readiness is instrumental in enabling individuals to fulfill their job responsibilities effectively. However, while work readiness was generally high, the average level of self-efficacy among students indicates that not all participants are fully confident in their capabilities, pointing to areas for further development. This may be attributable to the transitional context of post-pandemic education and work environments. During data collection, most students completed internships (PKL) under hybrid or shifting formats (online to offline), which may have disrupted the consistency of their experiential learning. As Makki et al. (2023) explained, self-efficacy functions through three interrelated dimensions: level (perceived task difficulty), strength (confidence intensity), and generality (cross-situational applicability), each of which contributes to an individual's capacity to face job demands and competition.

An interesting and somewhat unexpected finding was that internship experience did not significantly correlate with work readiness. This contradicts previous research by Findeisen (2020), which suggests that practical training experiences positively contribute to work preparedness. Additionally, the absence of significant relationships between sociodemographic factors (e.g., gender, school type, and internship duration) and both self-efficacy and work

readiness suggests that these competencies are not inherently dependent on personal background. In particular, the lack of gender differences supports the view of Wijayanti (2020), who argued that work readiness is no longer gender-biased due to increasingly equal opportunities in the labor market. However, one plausible explanation for the limited effect of internship (PKL) experience may lie in its duration. Most participants reported internship durations of only 0 to 3 months, which may be insufficient for meaningful knowledge internalization and skill development. This aligns with Bauer's (2007) argument that adequate organizational socialization and learning typically require at least six months of practical work experience. In sum, the findings of this study reinforce the critical role of self-efficacy in shaping vocational students' readiness for employment, while also highlighting the need for sustained, structured experiential learning and targeted interventions to further strengthen students' self-beliefs and workplace competencies.

CONCLUSION

This study researched the impact of self-efficacy on work readiness among vocational high school students in the Jabodetabek region. According to the findings, self-efficacy accounts for 45.3% of the variance and is a significant predictor of work readiness. This suggests that students who are more confident in their skills typically exhibit higher levels of preparedness for entering the workforce. The study also confirmed strong positive correlations between self-efficacy and the aspects of work readiness, personal traits, organizational intelligence, work competence, and social intelligence. These findings reinforce the importance of psychological resources, particularly self-efficacy, in shaping students' preparedness for employment. Additionally, the lack of influence from demographic variables such as gender, school type, and internship experience suggests that internal psychological factors may play a more critical role than background characteristics in determining work readiness.

Given the significant role of self-efficacy in enhancing work readiness, vocational schools and stakeholders in education and workforce preparation are encouraged to implement targeted interventions to strengthen students' self-efficacy. This can be achieved through structured internship programs, mentoring, skills workshops, and reflective learning strategies that help students recognize and build upon their strengths. Teachers and career counsellors should also integrate self-efficacy-enhancing practices into their teaching, such as goal setting, feedback, and modelling of successful behaviors. Furthermore, extending the duration and quality of internship experiences may provide richer opportunities for students to internalize workplace competencies. As the transition to employment continues to evolve in a post-pandemic context, these efforts are essential to ensure that vocational students are not only technically prepared but also psychologically equipped to thrive in the modern workforce.

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